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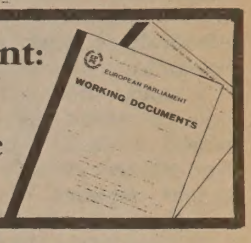

Critical report spurs Government to action on community care policy

The Government's care in the community policy is wasteful, disorganised and causing unnecessary suffering to elderly and disabled people. Current spending levels could provide adequate community-based services, but instead there is a dangerous trend towards a new pattern of residential care.

So says an incisive report from the Audit Commission for Local Authorities for England and Wales, the independent watchdog of Government policies as they effect local authorities.

The Commission's call for an urgent review coincides with a DHSS announcement that Sir Roy Griffiths is to look into options for making community care more effective. Sir Roy Griffiths headed the far-reaching and controversial review of management in the National Health Service in 1983.

The DHSS has announced that the review will be completed within 12 months, but organisations like the National Council for Voluntary Organisations and The Spastics Society think this is too long for disabled people to wait.

The Audit Commision report says that progress in community care has been slow and uneven.

In some places community services are inadequate to meet the needs created by the run-down of long-stay institutions in the NHS. No-one knows what has happened to many of the discharged mentally ill people, and the report says it is likely that a large proportion are in prison.

Although the reduction in NHS facilities has been partly offset by the rapid growth in private residential homes, the shift to this alternative, which costs the taxpayer over £500 billion a year, misses out more flexible and cost-effective forms of community care altogether.

Many local authorities, it says, are penalised through the grant system for building the very community services which government policy favours. Responsibility for introducing community-based services is fragmented between too many agencies with different priorities. And staffing arrangements are inadequate – the report points particularly to the shortage of occupational therapists.

Continued on page 16

Simon Crompton

A New Year's resolution for central government, local authorities and voluntary organisations: *to provide somewhere to live for severely disabled adults like John McDonaugh (above) when his mother is too old to look after him. Sheelagh McDonaugh and other parents would rather see their children die than go away to a long-stay hospital. She voiced the despair of others at the launch of Walsingham Community Homes Ltd (*see page 5*) which plans small, local, group homes run on Christian principles – the kind that many parents want. So far Walsingham has 7 projects.*

End is nigh for unique disabled persons' bus service

The Careline bus service will be axed on 24 January unless transport organisations come up with the funds to keep it going. Its fate will be decided at a crucial meeting on 12 January, called by Minister of Transport Peter Bottomley, between 4 major transport bodies and Alder Valley North, which runs the service.

Careline is London's first hourly, fixed-route bus service accessible to wheelchair passengers. It links the four main railway terminals and Heathrow airport.

Since its launch last July, Alder Valley North has been losing around £7,800 a week on average. It receives no financial help in running the service.

The buses have space for 21 seated passengers and 8 wheelchairs, but they have only been carrying an average of 4 passengers per trip.

At a meeting just before Christmas, Andrew Braddock, assistant manager of Alder Valley North, told representatives of London Regional Transport, British Rail, British Airways and the Airports Authority that Careline would close unless they pledged financial support.

LRT agreed to fund an on-bus survey, asking passengers what they think of the service, how they heard about it and how it could be improved. The survey is now underway and will be discussed at the next meeting.

Enquiries have been made to Alder Valley from bus companies all over the country who are thinking of setting up a similar service.

Paul Crowther of the Bus and Coach Council said: "Careline is the flagship; if it goes down that could be the end of integrated accessible transport."

MBE for Carol

Carol Myer, now director of the Stars Organisation for Spastics, has been awarded an MBE for her services to severely disabled people at the White Lodge Centre, Chertsey. From one small centre she created, in 13 years, three centres with a staff of 70.

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High costs delay help for disabled school leavers

Hopes that the Government will keep its promise and implement some sections of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act by April this year are likely to be dashed.

No start has been made either on implementing sections 5 and 6 of the Act, expected in the summer, which deal with setting up procedures for statementing school leavers and providing appropriate services for them.

John Major, Minister for Social Security and the Disabled, has admitted that plans to implement sections 5 and 6 quickly were set back after local authority associations warned of considerable resource implications.

When the DHSS met the Association of County Councils and the Association of Metropolitan Authorities on 22 December, as a preliminary to meeting Mr Major later this month, the associations produced some startling provisional figures.

They estimated that it would cost an extra £5m to set up procedures and staff to statement the school leavers who needed it. To provide appropriate services for them would, by the end of the second year, amount to an additional £30-50m. These figures did not include capital spending. (The Government accepted last July that it could cost £112m to implement the Act.)

Tom Clarke, sponsor of the Bill, believes that the increased resource implications are no excuse for delaying implementation of the Act. Speaking in the Commons on 15 December, he said: "It is not enough for the Treasury to influence the Government to the point where the will of Parliament and the House is being undermined because it thinks that the time is not right to give local authorities the resources that are necessary to give the Act true meaning."

He is particularly concerned about the school leavers. "Failure to implement the Act immediately will prevent the identification of 14-year-olds and thus endanger school leavers in 1988 and those leaving further education in 1991," he said.

"We are falling behind even in terms of planning for the future and I am sure that most honourable Members would regard such lethargy as deplorable."

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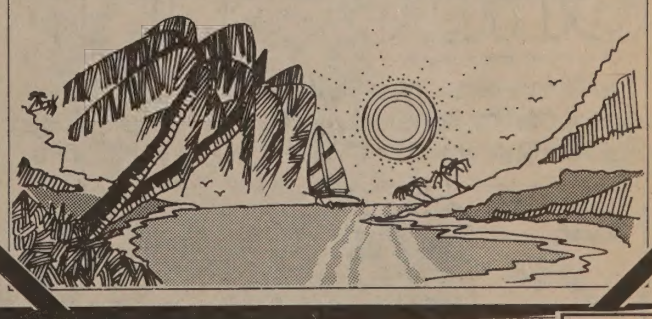
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Letters to the Editor

Disability *Now* 12 Park Crescent London W1N 4EQ

We need standards!

I read your article on official standards for car adaptations (*DN,* November) with great interest. I was pleased to see that manufacturers in this field appear so far to have adopted a responsible attitude towards their customers, who are obviously so dependent on the reliability of their transport.

I would, however, bring to your attention my own story which, I think, illustrates the irresponsible attitude of one particular supplier of pavement vehicles for the disabled.

In September 1985, I bought an "Outrider" from R F Nicholls Ltd of St Albans. This petrol-driven pavement vehicle is manufactured by Nicholls Vehicle Distributors and is claimed to conform to the "Use of Invalid Carriages on Highways Regulations, 1970". These regulations state, amongst other things, that such vehicles must be *"incapable"* of speeds over 4 mph.

For the first six months my Outrider was extremely unreliable. It refused to operate for more than about 5 hours at a time without needing a replacement spark plug. Even after a few hours it became very difficult to start, and my husband had to go everywhere with me lest the plug should need cleaning or changing while I was out.

The suppliers spent many hours tinkering with my Outrider but never got to the root of the problem.

Eventually we commissioned an independent engineer to examine the vehicle and he concluded that the reason for the difficulties we had experienced was a basic design fault which would be common to all Outriders: the engine was not being allowed to run in the correct operating range because of the speed-governing mechanism. The manufacturers, however, refused to accept his verdict.

Yet another problem occurred after Nicholls' engineers' final attempt to "cure" my machine. When it was returned from their workshop, my husband noticed that it was travelling rather fast. We measured the maximum speed at 6 mph, and this was later confirmed by the police, whose speed meter registered 8 mph on one run.

We naturally contacted Mr Nigel Nicholls, the managing director. He seemed quite unconcerned that the vehicle broke the regulations and was therefore illegal if used on the road or pavement. His explanation for its excessive speed was that I wasn't heavy enough!

My husband, meanwhile, also noticed that the rear lights and reflectors did not conform to the regulations either. Apart from being illegal, this made the vehicle positively dangerous if used at night. To this day, Mr Nicholls has refused to comment.

We referred the matter to the British Association of Wheelchair Distributors, who eventually (in September 1986) persuaded him to take back the vehicle and refund our purchase price. This Association has, however, not been able to stop the manufacture or sale of further Outriders.

Mr Nicholls claims that his company is amongst the leaders in the supply of equipment for the disabled. If this is the attitude he adopts and the standard of equipment he sells, then the time is certainly ripe for an official assessment of standards before the point of sale and, perhaps, for checks on the quality of after-sales service.

Barbara Shellard
93 Wendover Road
Stoke Mandeville, Bucks

Heather Newport

Barbara Shellard on her "extremely unreliable" Outrider.

Manufacturer replies

I am writing in answer to Mrs Shellard's letter.

Firstly, we think it is extremely important that the nature of the Outrider and what most people purchase it for are fully explained. The Outrider is a petrol driven all-terrain type of vehicle that will go places where most of the normal electric type of vehicles cannot. We have received pictures and letters from very satisfied Outrider users, some of which have been sent to us after hearing Mrs. Shellard's story.

She claims that her Outrider is incapable of being operated for longer than 5 hours without needing a replacement spark plug. She also claims that this is solely due to the speed governing mechanism which she says is fitted by N.V. Distributors, and according to her "independent engineer" is a design fault.

The speed governing mechanism is a standard fitment by Honda Ltd, the manufactures of the ATC70 upon which the Outrider is based. We are sure you will agree that a company such as Honda would not fit such a device unless they were satisfied with its operation.

With regard to the speed, it is a fact that unfortunately Mrs Shellard's Outrider had been wrongly set for her weight and it was capable of doing 5 mph (not 6 or 8 as Mrs Shellard has variously tried to claim). Mr Shellard's letter to us clearly indicates the speed (5 mph) and how they had measured it. We have also had the speed measured and confirm that that is 5 mph. The re-setting of the speed would only have taken a very short time if we had been allowed to complete it.

The lights in the Outrider are not illegal as can be quite clearly seen from the copy of a letter from the Department of Transport we have enclosed. It states quite clearly that lights are only required, and hence have to comply, if the vehicle is intended for road use. As the Outrider is not intended for road use it obviously does not have to comply.

Even so, Mrs Shellard's main contention as to why the lights were not legal was that the rear light was ¼ in. too low and that there was not a separate rear reflector, (even though there is an integral reflector). We think this point alone puts Mrs. Shellard's allegations into a very clear perspective.

Lastly, we cannot let Mrs Shellard's comments regarding our trade association go unanswered. Her contention that our association has attempted in any way to stop the sale of Outriders is complete fabrication, and we should also add that this complete saga has been referred to our legal counsel for their opinion upon the various libels that Mrs. Shellard has levelled at our company.

We have kept this reply as brief as possible and have therefore not been able to answer every allegation in full. But if anyone would like to inspect Mrs Shellard's Outrider to convince themselves of the facts, it is held at our premises and can be seen at anytime.

N.P Nicholls
Marketing Director
R.F. Nicholls Ltd
Soothouse Spring
Valley Road Industrial Estate
St. Albans, Herts

In a letter to Mrs Shellard's MP, Timothy Raison in November, Peter Bottomley, Under-Secretary of State for Transport, said: "Officials from the Department have been in touch with both the manufacturers and distributors about the problems with the Outrider referred to in Mr Shellard's letter. They have assured us that they will be looking at ways to ensure that the vehicle meets the requirements contained in the Use of Invalid Carriages on Highways legislations 1970."

Mr Bottomley said that there were no checks by the Department on low speed vehicles. "If we were to require manufacturers to submit to the normal vehicle examinations and Type Approval procedures, it would inevitably lead to the vehicles becoming significantly more expensive because of the low unit production involved. This would mean that they would be beyond the means of many of those people most in need of vehicles of this kind".

The British Surgical Trades Association, representing manufacturers and a few distributors of powered vehicles for disabled people, has launched its own code of practice. R.F. Nichols is a member – Editor.

DN helps

Congratulations on your newspaper which gives such excellent information to the disabled and those who care for them.

It has been valuable to me as a member of a planning group organising a workshop on community care for the next National Congress held in Liverpool in April.

We will be looking at 3 aspects – residential services, services available to carers at home and sheltered accommodation. In particular we will be looking at how much participation there is by the consumer when choices are made.

Any information *DN* readers may have about good practice would be welcome.

Hilda Smith
Anderley Lodge
216 Stow Hill
Newport, Gwent

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(sic)

DN's diary column
by Simon Crompton

Inopportune

On a recent visit to India, Rachel Hurst, chairman of the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People, was concerned to find that the policy-making body of one of the country's largest voluntary organisations for disabled people is almost entirely composed of able-bodied people. Which is odd considering that the name of the organisation is the National Society for Equal Opportunities for the Handicapped.

Bedevilled

Continuing the world-wide theme, a survey in *New Horizons,* the quarterly review of rehabilitation work in Indonesia, provides an intriguing glimpse into the way traditional beliefs about disability have refused to be ousted by western medical opinion. In a sample of people with disabilities from Java, over 12 per cent believed their disability was caused by the devil. 8 per cent believed it was caused by spirits and over 15 per cent believed it was predestined. Other stated causes were Karma, God's punishment and God's curse. Only half believed it was caused by disease, illness or accident.

Sobering

Final glamorous locale in the Sic international attitudes exposé is a smoke-browned drinking stall in the Albany on Great Portland Street – esteemed retreat for weary frequenters of the Royal National Institute for the Blind, Graeae Theatre Company and The Spastics Society. Last month an inquisitive Irishman, apparently sober, approached *DisabilityNow's* television columnist Chris Davies, and asked his helper what was wrong with him. Upon learning that Chris had cerebral palsy, the man looked glum. "Big problem," he said. "My brother had that and my mother killed him." This seems a little drastic. One can only hope that the man had a fairly heavy relationship with the blarney stone.

For application forms and full details call the Assistant Recruiting Officer. All persons applying must be 21-35 and have no physical disabilities. Call now on PORTHMADOG 4298. *Job advertisement for an American company in the* Cambrian News. *15 August, 1986 – Eileen Fry.*

* * *

Silver Bullet (18) is this week's horror offering . . . It is left to a tenacious young cripple to uncover a blood-chilling secret. *Film review in the* Hitchen Comet, *19 November. Sent in by Helen Gray.*

* * *

Please send your contributions (not forgetting the source and your name) to Watch It Disability Now, *12 Park Crescent, London W1N 4EQ.*

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Severe weather payments: new scheme gets cold reception

Michael Meacher, Labour's social security spokesperson, introduced a critical motion on the Government's severe weather payments in the Commons on 2 December.

The Government's new scheme allows for a payment to be made if the average temperature falls below minus 1.5°C over 7 days from Monday to Sunday.

Any household which has someone under 2, over 65, or chronically sick or disabled can qualify for the payment of £5 per week if the claimant has less than £500 in savings. The scheme was introduced when the present arrangements were criticised after last year's severe weather.

Mr Meacher objected to the new scheme on a number of counts.

If the new formula had been in operation last winter – the coldest for 40 years – half the country would have received no benefit at all, he said. In February 1986 it was estimated that about 7,000 old people died of cold. Britain's average figure for deaths from hypothermia is higher than Sweden's where the climate is far colder, he added.

He feared that fewer people might be helped this year than last. If people could not afford to heat their homes properly there would be more deaths from hypothermia.

Mr Meacher also attacked the Government for arguing that the severe weather payments scheme was not designed primarily to fight hypothermia; supplementary benefit was meant to do that through the fuel allowance and weekly heating addition. He said these additions were too low to keep people warm and, anyway, the heating additions and payments had been cut by the Government in many cases.

Under the sliding scale margin rule, pensioners, long-term disabled people and single parents have had their weekly heating addition cut by £52 per year. On top of this, in August 1985 the Government abolished central heating additions for all new claimants – a benefit worth £288 per year at current rates, he said.

He also criticised the £500 savings limit necessary to qualify for the severe weather payment because it disqualified many people and was much lower than the £3,000 limit for supplementary benefits.

John Major, Minister for Social Security and the Disabled, said there had been significant improvements in the value of heating additions. Families on supplementary benefit with children under 5 are guaranteed a heating addition of £2.20 per week; so are disabled householders on the long-term supplementary benefit rate.

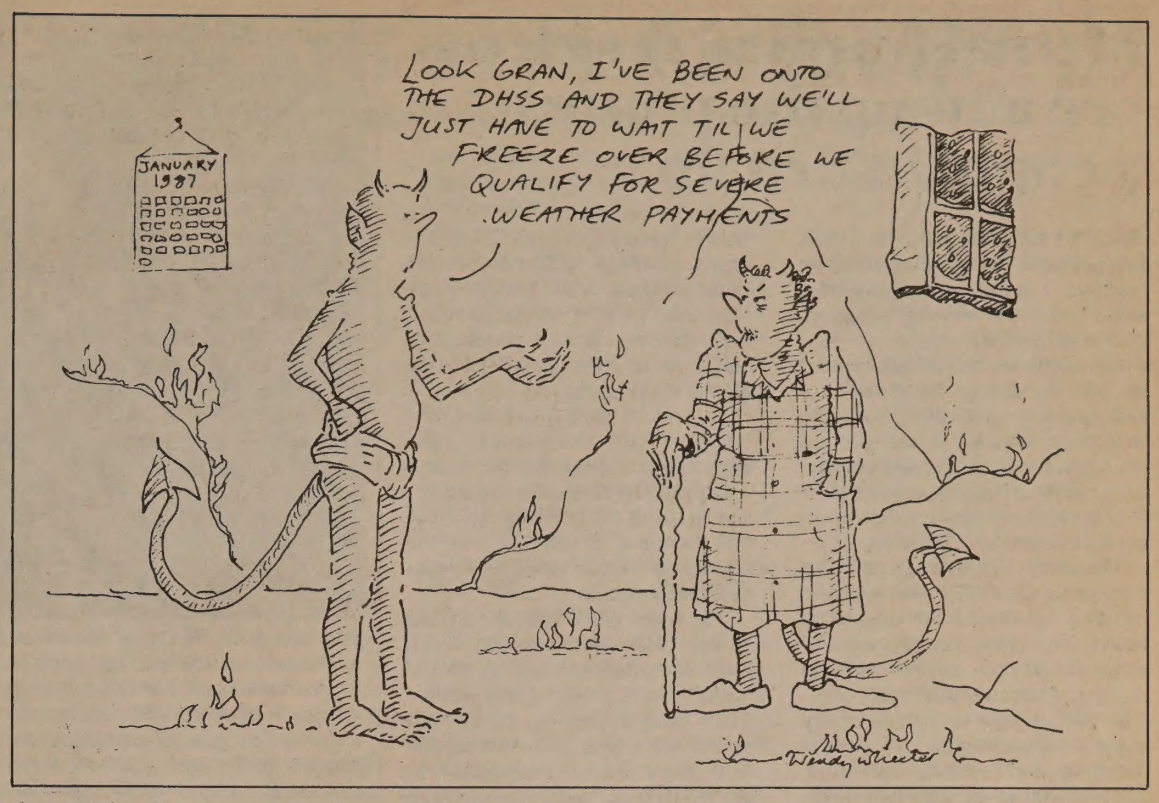
Pensioners over 85 get a higher rate of £5.55 per week and this is also paid automatically to those receiving attendance allowance and mobility allowance.

He claimed that the number of these disability benefits had increased substantially under the present Government.

The Minister defended the new severe weather payments scheme. He thought it would be simple and easy to apply: it was concentrated on those groups of people – "the elderly, the sick, the disabled and the very young" – about whom most concern had been expressed. It was precisely because of the Government's concern for these groups that the severe weather payments had been restricted to those felt to be most in need. These people would receive more, not less, than before.

Archy Kirkwood, for the Liberals, was not convinced by the assurances of the Minister. The 7 days qualifying period was not flexible enough to take account of weather conditions and the minus 1.5°C limit was set far too low, even for many areas in Scotland.

He also mentioned that the fuel needs of many people in low income groups are met by paraffin and coal and the prices of both have risen faster than the rise in supplementary benefit. This was a serious problem as a high proportion of the income of low income groups goes on heating.


LOOK GRAN, I'VE BEEN ONTO THE DHSS AND THEY SAY WE'LL JUST HAVE TO WAIT TIL WE FREEZE OVER BEFORE WE QUALIFY FOR SEVERE WEATHER PAYMENTS
JANUARY 1987
Wendy Meister

New bill to stop embryo research

Alistair Burt (Conservative) introduced a Private Members Bill on 10 December that would stop any further research on pre-embryos (the stage from conception to 14 days).

Research on pre-embryos has contributed to the improvement in *in-vitro* fertilisation, a technique that helps childless couples to have children.

Researchers in the field also hope to identify some of the genetic causes of handicap and develop screening methods for those who may be at risk. Studies of the genes of pre-embryos can already detect muscular dystrophy, cystic fibrosis, haemophilia and Down's syndrome.

As Mr Burt came fourteenth in the Private Members ballot, there is no chance of the Bill becoming law in this session.

However, its introduction comes hard on the heels of a Government consultation paper on the Warnock Report (1984).

After consultation, the Government is committed to introducing a Bill in the next Parliament which will include alternative clauses for and against pre-embryo research and give MPs a free vote. If recent voting patterns were repeated, this would lead to a statutory ban on further research.

Brian Lamb

New rules for mobility allowance?

Many severely disabled people are being denied Mobility Allowance or are having their renewal claims rejected because, physically, they can "walk".

In May last year Peter Thurnham MP tabled an Early Day Motion (see *Disability Now,* June '86) calling on the Government to review the rules for those people who are severely handicapped, or otherwise functionally incapable of being independently mobile. So far the Government has refused to carry out such a review.

Those groups suffering in particular are deaf-blind people and blind people with other severe disabilities; people with profound mental handicap and severe behavioural problems; and autistic children.

Successive Government ministers have recognised the strength of the arguments to extend the allowance to these few people, but have maintained that changes in the regulations should not "open the floodgates" to a mass of other claimants, and that regulations should be easily interpreted.

A group of disability organisations, including the Disability Alliance, MENCAP and The Spastics Society, are now proposing an amendment to the regulations which would allow that if a claimant needs "continuous physical support or control from another person" in order to get around, they should now be eligible for the allowance.

Jack Ashley MP, chairman of the All Party Disablement Group, tabled a new Early Day Motion on 4 December which calls on the Government to make a positive commitment to amend the regulations along the lines suggested.

If you would like to help increase the signatures for Jack Ashley's motion, write to your MP giving your views and asking him or her to sign EDM No 283.

Linda Avery

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AUSTIN ROVER
Mobility Scheme

DN/1/87

Mental hospital residents are among the poorest people in Britain

"When I came in here they took my pension book away and I've not had a penny to call my own since" – A 70-year-old resident of a psychiatric hospital.

Residents in mental illness and mental handicap hospitals are amongst the poorest people in Britain today. Most are denied the right to an adequate personal income which could ensure they retain some choice and independence in their lives.

These are the findings of *Not A Penny To Call My Own*, written by Martin Bradshaw and Ann Davis, the first report for 10 years to focus on poverty in long-stay mental hospitals.

Drawing on a national survey of patients' money in 270 mental handicap and mental illness hospitals, it demonstrates how welfare benefits policies and the administration of residents' money by hospitals play a part in creating this poverty.

The report points out that admission to hospital leads to a cut in benefit, which brings the basic personal allowance down to just £7.75 a week. This must cover expenses such as newspapers, stamps, trips out, holidays, gifts for family and friends, and often clothes as well.

Some elderly patients have no legal right to any benefit and have to rely on hospital "pocket money" given at the discretion of the administrator. In some cases medical officers can recommend the reduction or withdrawal of benefit on the grounds that the resident is unable to make use of it for "personal comfort or enjoyment".

To add to the problems, many residents are not claiming the benefits they are entitled to, and the report criticises hospitals for not helping them to do so. Only one hospital of the 270 in the survey offered advice on benefits to all new patients.

The report also calls for an end to the restrictive way in which most hospitals manage patients' money, which effectively denies them free access to it. Benefit books are taken away on admission and residents often have to get written permission from staff to withdraw money, frequently being asked what they want it for.

"To be forced to justify your need to use your own money is degrading and leads to a considerable loss of dignity and self-respect," says the report.

Not A Penny To Call My Own – poverty among residents in mental illness and mental handicap hospitals. *£3 inc p&p from the Disability Alliance ERA, 25 Denmark Street, London WC2H or the King's Fund Centre, 126 Albert St, London NW1.*

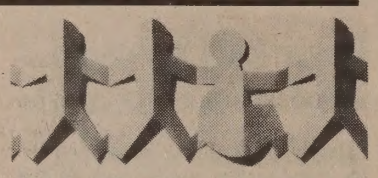
Just the job. *Three of the disabled trainees at the Rank Xerox ITec in Slough landed themselves jobs in information technology as a direct result of the centre's open day on 21 November. One was offered employment on the spot. Jointly sponsored by Rank Xerox, Berkshire County Council, Slough Borough Council and the Manpower Services Commission, the ITec aims to give 40 16-17 year-olds and 6-8 disabled people a training to suit today's business requirements. So far, 98 per cent of trainees have been placed at the end of the two-year course, and out of a total of 28 disabled trainees, 25 have found jobs. Above: the Mayor of Slough, Councillor Shreela Flather, with one of the trainees at the open day.*

A week for a changing society

The Spastics Society will be holding its first national week for 16 years in 1987.

During the week 12-20 September there will be a launch party, 2 major fund raising events, and many smaller happenings all over the country.

Sheila Rawstorne, ex-director of the Stars Organisation for Spastics, has been appointed director of the National Week.



The motif reflecting the theme of this year's National Week.

"The aim is to make the public more aware of a changing Spastics Society and attitudes to disabled people," she says.

Long-awaited survey on educational needs of deaf-blind children

The Department of Education and Science is carrying out a long-awaited survey of deaf-blind children and their educational needs.

Every local education authority in the country has been sent a discussion document and asked for details on how they educate children with dual sensory impairment.

SENSE (the National Association for Deaf-Blind and Rubella Handicapped) has been concerned for many years about the lack of specialist provision for this group of children and the lack of understanding of their needs. The survey and discussion document have been devised with the help of SENSE.

The document deals with the characteristics of deaf-blind children, their assessment under the 1981 Education Act, selection of schools and curriculum, pre-school provision, education beyond 16 and the implications for teacher training of providing for deaf/blind children.

It states: "The differences in the degree of disability, often complicated by other handicaps, has meant that these needs have not been considered so far in a particularly coherent way. The intention of this paper is to obtain more information so that a statement of their needs on a national basis can be drawn up."

Paul Ennals, head of welfare services at SENSE, says that SENSE is giving the paper its full support, even though it is disappointed that, for procedural reasons, it will only survey education authorities and not individual schools and units.

"We have to ensure that, when the questionnaires come back, there is a quick follow up, and a strategy developed," he says.

Fowler extends care allowance arrears deadline

Married women may now claim arrears of invalid care allowance up until 31 August 1987, not 31 December 1986. Social Services Secretary Norman Fowler bowed to pressure from carers and disability organisations and extended the deadline last month.

Disabled people receiving attendance allowance from local social security offices should receive a letter when their order books are renewed in the next few months, explaining the extension of the care allowance.

Married women can claim back payments from 22 December 1984 when a European Community directive on equal treatment of the sexes came into effect.

But the Disability Alliance has charged that arrangements for paying the care allowance are still in breach of the directive.

Arrears of more than 12 months are being paid as a "special additional payment", not as invalid care allowance. This means that claimants will not be credited with National Insurance contributions for this period.

Safer crossings for blind people

Blind people will find crossing the road easier and safer in the future, as local authorities start to install textured pavement surfaces at zebra and pelican crossings.

The paving slabs have raised bumps on them which can be felt underfoot to help blind and visually disabled people find the crossing and the pole carrying the pedestrian push-button. They are arranged in a T-shape, making it easier for blind people to align themselves in the right direction to cross.

The surfaces have been on trial at 20 sites around the country for the last three years and local authorities now have the go-ahead to install them at their discretion at all zebra and pelican crossings in their area.

Crown House Furse stairlift model 585 mentioned in the Naidex review (*DN, November*) can do better than was stated. It will negotiate staircases of up to 53° in incline and corners of virtually any angle. Apologies to the manufacturer.

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Daily Telegraph

Radio personality Gloria Hunniford met Laurence, a disabled child awaiting adoption, at the launch of the Be My Parent *scheme.*

Video adoption brings hope to disabled children

Disabled children awaiting adoption now have more hope of finding a family, with the launch of a video adoption programme by British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF).

There are thousands of physically and mentally disabled children waiting for a family, many of whom have been in care for years.

The 15-minute videos, which show the child at work and play in familiar surroundings, will allow prospective parents to get an idea of the child's personality and will also give them a realistic idea of what adopting a child with special needs will mean in practice.

The new scheme will run in conjunction with BAAF's *Be My Parent* catalogue, which carries photographs and information on around 150 children in local authority care.

Prospective adopters can look through the catalogue and send off for the video of any child that interests them.

'Fit for work' winners need not meet 3% quota

A fish-processing company in Cornwall, a boat-yard in Scotland and a police force in Wales were among the 100 winners of the Manpower Services Commission's Fit for Work Awards 1986, announced last month.

The award is given in recognition of companies' achievements in employing disabled people.

Fifteen local authorities and companies of all sorts and sizes were among the winners, chosen for their effective policy in employing disabled people and retaining employees who become disabled.

The judges also look for fair consideration of all applicants, based on their ability to do the job, provision of special aids or adaptation of the workplace, training to fully develop the skills and potential of disabled employees and promotion according to ability.

Companies providing sheltered employment or opportunities for young disabled people are also considered.

Winners do not have to meet the 3 per cent quota of registered disabled employees, but the majority of them do.

"We do not insist that companies fulfil the quota because this is often difficult to do, and many of them also employ unregistered disabled people," said Mary MacKenzie, chairman of the award's sifting panel.

MSC chairman Bryan Nicholson, said: "It is good to see so many employers 'thinking disabled'. They have proved that disability need be no handicap in the workplace. So many apparent problems can be overcome by determination and good will."

One of the winners, Applied Security Design Ltd of Rotherham, who manufacture security lights and alarm fittings, started employing disabled people 2 years ago. Now there are 12 disabled employees out of a workforce of 52.

"We were sceptical at first that they could do their job," said works manager Lynne Rose. "It was just fear of the unknown. I think that stops a lot of employers."

A parent's cry for help

Sheelagh McDonaugh speaks out for ageing parents everywhere

We are three parents representing all the parents who have multiply handicapped sons and daughters attending the Weir, Cobury Cross and South Norwood intensive support units in Lambeth.

Our sons and daughters, who are profoundly mentally handicapped with multiple physical handicaps, have lived at home with their families all their lives. They are all doubly incontinent, wheelchair bound, have no verbal speech and need to be both dressed and fed. In other words, they need the same care as a new born baby.

We had to fight very hard for schools. Years later we had to fight again for adult special care day units for when our sons and daughters were grown up and no longer schoolchildren.

Now we are growing old and know that the time is approaching when it will be physically impossible for us to continue caring for our sons and daughters at home.

We have been asking the local council for the last 10 years to provide residential and respite care in our borough. We want small community houses for our sons and daughters in the area in which we live. There is still no provision for us here.

Some progress has been made by social services, Mencap and the local society for mentally handicapped people in providing respite and residential care for children and the less handicapped adults. However, our children, who are the most handicapped, the oldest and need the most intensive care, are at the bottom of the heap of priorities.

We have now reached a crisis point and can go on no longer unless we get help.

Three parents have confided in us that they can see no alternative but to put their son or daughter to sleep and take their own lives when they can go on no longer.

My son is 23 and I am 53. There are parents in our group who have been caring for over 40 years. One mother has never had a break in 42 years. Another 63 year old mother is caring for 2 multiply-handicapped daughters aged 28 and 30 and has an invalid husband. Two of our parents are in their 80s.

We love our sons and daughters and care for them day and night, 7 days a week, year in and year out.

We fear desperately for their future when we die or become too ill to care for them at home.

We want to see them being cared for in our own community, near family and friends and attending their own family support units and churches.

We are the only people who can communicate with them and refuse to allow them to be sent away into the country where no one knows their language. They are people in their own right with feelings like anyone else and we demand that they are recognised as such and their needs catered for with dignity.

Walsingham Community Homes seem to us like a ray of hope.

A speech given at the launch of Walsingham Community Homes, St Joseph's Centre, The Burroughs, Hendon, London NW4.

Cabbies raise £50,000 for taxi conversions

London cabbies have raised £50,000 at their annual ball – enough to convert 30 more FX4 black cabs to carry passengers in wheelchairs.

The conversions are already underway and the cabs should be available in London next month.

Among the donations was a brand new taxi cab presented by Barry Widdowson, deputy chairman and chief operating officer of London Taxis International, which will be raffled off during the coming months amongst taxi drivers and the taxi trade. It is hoped that this will raise enough to convert another 20 taxis.

Companies throughout Britain have also been asked to sponsor cabs at a total cost of £2,000 each, and 9 companies have already agreed. The cabs will carry plaques engraved with the name of the sponsor.

The conversion of the FX4W for disabled people has been fully approved by the Public Carriage Office for licenced hire. It can be carried out on any traditional black cabs made in the past 12 years which means most of the 28,000 now in use.

The conversion is also proving popular outside London. See the table for a list of drivers or taxi companies with converted cabs.

Where to find FX4W wheelchair conversions

BASILDON	Mr Brigginshaw	31 Fairlop Gardens, Basildon
BATH	Paul Dellenty	0225 313133
BEDWORTH	Mr Blackwell	0203 363346
BOURNEMOUTH	Messrs Arnold & Moser	0202 571061
BRISTOL	Mr J E Ford	0454 318891
BURTON ON TRENT	Joan Watson	0283 68445
AVON COUNTY COUNCIL	Mr L Vernon	18 Boscombe Crescent, Downend
CARDIFF	Mr B Thomas	0792 51111
CARLISLE	R Casey	0220 38913
COVENTRY	C Allen	0203 553555
DORKING	Mr Darke (Mole Valley)	0372 375174
GLOUCESTER	Mr Hemmings	0452 730539
HASTINGS	Mr Knight-Latter	0424 224746
LONDON	Radio Taxis	01-272 0272
	Computer Cab (Radio)	01-286 2728
MANCHESTER	Mr Greenwood	061-643 2032
NOTTINGHAM	Mr Hussain	0602 701701
PLYMOUTH	Mr Hill	0752 785439
STOKE ON TRENT	Mr Massey	0782 817627
SWANSEA	Mr A A Hughes	0792 793979
WILTSHIRE (Trowbridge)	Mr Brian Hart	0373 823368 (Ace Taxis)
WIDNES	Mr Bond	17 Orkney Close Widnes, Cheshire
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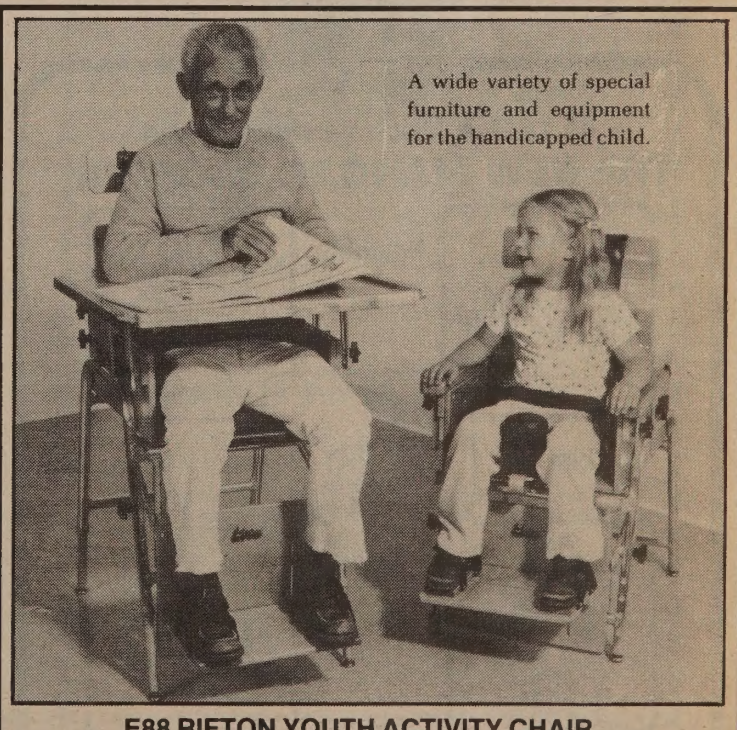

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Transport ...*without*... Handicap

Nigel Smith reports on a positive international conference

To mark the British Presidency of the European Economic Community, the Department of Transport hosted a major international conference "Transport Without Handicap... A Priority for Europe" in London last month.

Four hundred people came, including politicians, transport planners, providers and users, representatives of disability organisations and academics. A quarter of them were from 8 EEC countries, plus Sweden, Norway and Switzerland.

The Conference was optimistic, partly because there have been so many exciting new developments in European countries this decade, and partly because a gathering of enthusiasts is always infectious! They were admonished by the outstanding conference chairman, Dr Jan Terlouw (Holland). "We know the ideal environment, we have heard about the examples, the technology is there, the planning should be there... let's make politicians aware of the size of the problem".

If politicians realised that improving transport facilities for elderly and disabled people benefitted many transport users such as parents with prams and people with shopping, said Dr Terlouw, then they would be more interested in taking action. It was an invitation to go away and lobby.

The conference included practical solutions in different European countries, political statements and academic and philosophical contributions.

Sweden still leads

Sweden still leads Europe in its public transport provision for people with disabilities. Sweden pioneered the Dial-a-Ride and the Taxicard in the late 1960s, with responsibility passing from voluntary organisations to district councils in the 1970s.

Since 1979, all Swedish municipalities have had special transport services (Dial-a-Rides and Taxicards), with 35 per cent of the cost provided by central Government. Also in 1979 an Act was passed which provided for the gradual adaptations of public transport terminals, vehicles and local surroundings over 10 years.

Today, 4.5 per cent of the Swedish population are entitled to use special transport. But the Hako Commission Report (1975) showed that some 12 per cent have a disability which at least "restricts their ability to travel" and another 12 per cent are estimated to have "less ability to use public transport thanfully active people".

As a result, said Mrs Agneta Stahl of Lund University Department of Traffic Planning and Technology, many people are suffering very limited mobility because they are not severely impaired enough to qualify for special transport, but are deterred from using conventional public transport by distance to or from the bus stop and difficulties in boarding, leaving or travelling on the vehicle.

Sweden has now recognised 4 separate sections of the public transport system: special transport system (door to door); service routes; ordinary public transport with improved services and technical changes (such as low first step, stop announcements, time given for passengers to sit down before the bus moves); and ordinary public transport.

Service routes are a new idea using low-floor mini or midibuses with a ramp or lift on routes which have bus stops no more than 100 metres from anyone's house.

Borås in South West Sweden was chosen for the first experiments with service routes and Mr Sten Forsberg, general manager of Borås Lokaltrafik, explained now they were being developed in his city. Routes were planned by comparing aerial maps with detailed demographic data for areas of the city. Four Servicelinjens have been developed in two years, and by 1989 the whole city will have them. Special transport will then be withdrawn.

It is expected that these new, public transport systems accessible to the whole population will cost less than the former segregated systems.

Pioneering Metro

The Lille Metro, opened in 1983, had several brand new design features. It was the world's first fully automated Metro and the first system designed to be fully accessible to wheelchair users.

Monsieur J-C Prouillet of the Communaute Urbaine de Lille, Service Metro, said that the consortium of 86 local authorities which run the Metro aimed to make it "very welcoming in terms of safety and comfort."

The train entrance is at platform level allowing easy access and the unique platform gates make it impossible for a wheelchair to fall onto the tracks. All stations are equipped with a lift. Part of the cost was met by a central government grant.

Top quality equipment, TV monitoring and intercoms ensure passenger safety and confidence. Places for disabled motorists are reserved in all station car parks.

The Lille Metro is so well used that a second line is under construction with a third being considered. Similar systems are planned for Strasbourg, Toulouse and Bordeaux.

French railways adapt

Monsieur Pierre Steroux explained changes being made on French railways to benefit the disabled traveller, such as reserved car parking, sliding or two-way station doors, station maps at the entrance showing the best routes for wheelchair users, lowered ticket office counters, improved toilet facilities and trained staff. There are lifts and ramps to enable wheelchair users to board trains.

Some trains carry special small wheelchairs so that people can easily move about trains – an idea which British Rail has so far resisted.

Seats have been removed in both 1st and 2nd class areas on Inter City trains to enable disabled passengers to travel in their wheelchairs and some coaches have specially adpated lavatories. Indeed, some 900 long-distance coaches will have special facilities for wheelchair users – some local services too.

SNCF has distributed over 600,000 guides and research is continuing in conjunction with disabled people's organisations.

Peter Bottomley (left) Under-Secretary of State for Transport with John Major, Minister for Social Security and the Disabled.

UK comes second

The message picked up informally from delegates is that Britain's provision is probably second only to Sweden. But other countries are catching up fast and there is still a long way to go.

Our Dial-a-Ride network is incomplete – indeed, it is not a network. The lack of national standards for buses means that many inaccessible vehicles have now been introduced by private operators. The mushrooming minibus operators are losing a wonderful opportunity by using inaccessible vehicles, and the East Sussex initiative with wheelchair-accessible rural transport is probably unique. Where are the wheelchair-accessible Post-buses?

On the positive side, Britain leads the world in accessible taxis. Hopefully, in 10 years' time all taxis in Britain will be wheelchair-accessible (the FX4W and the new Metrocab). Unfortunately, the Government considers that whether local taxis are "London type" or saloon cars is a matter for local democracy which means that the prospect of seeing wheelchair-accessible taxis in many areas is remote. Perhaps a few local entrepreneurs will demonstrate the increased business which a wheelchair-accessible taxi can bring.

British Rail's lead (yes, lead!) in Inter-city travel is now being rapidly eroded and perhaps overtaken by countries such as Sweden, France, Denmark and West Germany.

The right noises

Nevertheless, British politicians are making some of the right noises and that is hopeful.

Peter Bottomley MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, said in his opening address that the 5½ million mobility-impaired people in Britain were "significant people in significant numbers".

He conceded that in the UK there were "still many things wrong... we are only just understanding the problems and must be consistent in tackling them." He said that priority must be given to those who cannot get from their own front door.

He thought that the greatest achievement since the Department had hosted a national conference in the International Year of Disabled People (1981) was the recognition that transport for disabled people "is a transport issue, not a welfare one."

"Priorities for action"

Dr David Gillingwater of Loughborough University presented an important paper on the social and economic benefits of providing accessible public transport.

He said that the cost of providing transport has not been taken into account either in Care in the Community policy or its implementation – for example, moving disabled or elderly people from institutions to the community will put extra pressure on health authorities. He did not mention the extra cost which social services departments will also have to meet if there is no accessible public transport system.

Dr Gillingwater identified "priorities for action" for research and policy.

Research is vitally needed, he said, to identify both welfare and transport benefits from the user's point of view – in other words, more information about how people use transport – and also to assess projects for their social implications not just their cost-effectiveness.

On policy, he said there was "a crying need" for:

- A coherent policy for transport provision for disabled people across *all* central government departments and statutory agencies with responsibility for access
- A coherent policy for special transport provision at local level, but with key ministerial responsibility
- A statutory obligation on *all* transport providers to assess the travel needs of people with disabilities going beyond the requirements of current legislation.

Legislation for Europe

It is obvious to many that only when the EEC agrees about disabled people travelling freely will member states be forced to take co-ordinated action.

Mr Georges Anastassopoulos, MEP and President of the European Parliamentary Committee on Transport, acknowledged that progress has been "slow and limited... unequal to the magnitude of your problems".

His ambition is "to integrate those people into the fabric of our society" and he said that the European Parliament and the European Commission were working together to deal with problems. This month the European Parliament is holding a public hearing and the Commission has a workshop on transport.

In the final plenary session, the Chairman asked whether the Conference felt that legislation was necessary to make public transport accessible to disabled people. Almost everyone agreed that it was.

Nigel Smith is Community Services Development Manager for The Spastics Society.

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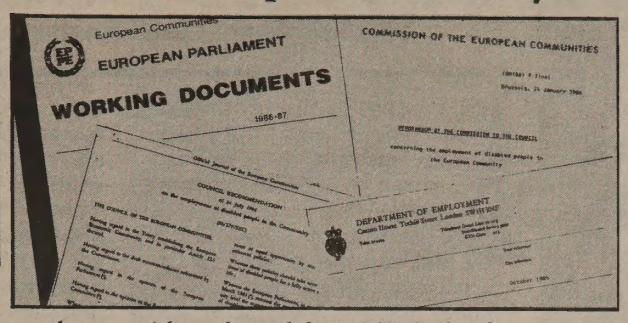
Europe ducks the issue

The European Community Recommendation on the employment of disabled people turned out to be a grave disappointment for some. Simon Crompton finds out why

Kenneth Clarke



Dafydd Wigley

Experts and laymen alike can be forgiven for not knowing that the European Community adopted a major recommendation on the employment of disabled people in June last year. Destined to be buried with sheaves of other forgotten European action-plans, resolutions and recommendations, it was only saved from total oblivion by parliamentary questions from Jack Ashley and, most recently, Dafydd Wigley.

If the document has been neglected, so has the fact that the recommendations handed to the European Community's Council of Ministers was a radical and far-reaching document, whilst the recommendation that finally emerged was a fudge.

The European Commission, the European Community's civil service, gave a clear indication that anti-discrimination legislation should be introduced to ensure fair opportunities for disabled people. But the Council of Ministers changed this to a vague intention to help disabled people establish their rights "in accordance with national law and practice".

Whereas the Commission recommended that rules on unfair dismissal should contain specific provision to protect people from disability, the Council changed this to an innocuous "measures to avoid as far as possible dismissals linked to disability".

And on quotas, the Commission recommended that "measures should be adopted for making these targets and enforcing them." But the Council of Ministers removed any commitment to an enforced quota and rejected an amendment from the European Parliament which proposed a minimum of 5 per cent disabled employees in every company employing more than 20 employees.

British companies employing more than 20 people are at present required to have 3 per cent registered disabled, but they can easily obtain exemption permits. The final European Communities Recommendation will do nothing to change this.

In effect the Government has been let off the hook: it will not have to make any changes to its much-criticised policy on equal opportunities for disabled people at work.

The Spastics Society is not happy. In a letter to the Department of Employment, director John Cox, said "... we are disappointed that, despite our comments, references in the draft Recommendation to the need to give legal rights to disabled people and impose legal obligations on Government and employers have been removed from the final version."

In his reply, Alan Davies, principal in charge of the Manpower Policy Division at the Department of Employment, defended the recommendation. He said it endorsed the principle of equal opportunity for disabled people, encouraged the elimination of negative discrimination, and provided a "clear but flexible framework for the future development of measures to help the employment of disabled people."

He went on: "I would like to emphasise that the Government is firmly committed to the principle of equal opportunity for disabled people, which is promoted through the variety of schemes and services run by the Manpower Services Commission. The Government was pleased to note that the EC Commission and Council have explicitly endorsed the MSC's Code of Practice ..."

Bert Massie, assistant director (disablement services) at RADAR, which unlike The Spastics Society was consulted on the Recommendation at an early stage, is not greatly surprised that the document did not turn out to be more radical. The Council of Ministers, he says, had difficulty reconciling the British position with countries which have less developed policies towards disabled people like Greece, France and Italy. "I know that employment services for disabled people are bad in the United Kingdom, but we're way ahead of many other countries in the European Community," he says.

Others, knowing the Government's strong resistance to legislation for disabled people, think the picture might be slightly different.

Dafydd Wigley, the Plaid Cymru MP, says: "There's no doubt that this Government hasn't been the friend of disabled people. What progress there has been is because they have been kicked and bullied into things rather than taking positive initiatives themselves."

In a parliamentary question to John Lee, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment, Mr Wigley asked whether the Government supported or opposed the changes which appeared in the final Recommendation. The reply was evasive and familiar. "Ministers and officials took an active part in negotiations on the Recommendation, and I believe the final text provides a clear but flexible framework for the continued development of measures to help the employment of disabled people."

When asked about the Government's stance at the Council of Ministers stage, where Britain was represented in confidential meetings by Kenneth Clarke, Minister for Employment, Alan Davies from the Department of Employment said: "I wouldn't like to speak out of turn by saying that one country was more vocal than the others, but I can say that there was a unanimous feeling that there should be a recommendation of this type."

However, a briefing for United Kingdom Members of the European Parliament reveals that the Government was less than euphoric about the whole idea from the start.

"In the Government's view," it says, "there is some doubt as to the EC's competence and responsibility to undertake measures in the field of equality of opportunity."

And its stance on legislation and enforced quotas is quite clearly spelt out.

"The draft recommendation and model code as originally planned go further in a number of respects than existing law and practice, in giving specific rights to disabled people and in imposing obligations on Government and employers. The UK at present considers it appropriate, beyond existing legislation, to rely on non-statutory means ..."

It goes on: "The Government does not believe that quota systems are always practicable or effective. The UK prefers to underwrite the existing legislative position with non-statutory pressure on ... employers."

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Make the most of yourse

A different hairdo, a manicure, make-up are well established morale boosters for group in Oxford has gone much further, experimenting with alternative the reflexology. Carol Houseman explains how the group developed, and its me

Jack Howarth House in Oxford offers 24-hour care to 12 young men and women over 16 who have severe physical and mental disabilities. The Jack Howarth Day Centre is also open to them and others around Oxford for activities and for learning social skills.

A year ago we formed a women's group. It now has 7 members.

The group was formed to give much needed support to women who were making the transition from teenager to adult. Going through adolescence is difficult enough when the person is able bodied; the problem is much greater when you are severely disabled.

Disabled people often suffer from an ignorant society which treats them as children. They also have the problem of parents who fear them growing up and want to protect them from possible hardships. They often can't get rid of aggressive energy like other teenagers. All this means that they can end up holding on to childlike ways rather than allowing themselves to become adults.

Our long term aim was to help the young women develop social confidence and a feeling of self-worth.

Our programme started by explaining bodily functions and how members could help themselves with normal women's problems such as pre-menstrual tension – by healthy eating, for example.

Having PMT is no fun when you are in a wheelchair, particularly if you don't understand what is happening. We found that discussing PMT acted as a catalyst, allowing people to talk about things they had never discussed with us before – feelings they had about themselves and towards the opposite sex. Our twice-a-week sessions became an open forum where they could talk freely about their hopes and fears.

Soon the women began to take responsibilities within the group. There is now a resident secretary who is in charge of compiling and typing any letters we want to send and another who is in charge of skin care and hair care products.

Gradually the room we met in has taken on a new look. One member who is now interested in growing plants and flower-arranging looks after the flowers, and others have made mobiles and posters showing how they see women in society. Everyone is enthusiastic.

Touching is the best therapy of all, the group has found. Paula Henry, who is severely mentally and physically disabled, responded dramatically when Carol Houseman gave her a foot massage. The physical contact is as important as the massage itself, says Carol.

Make-up helps the women feel confide chose, some eyeshadow and Carol Ho Michele. "I like the make-up best." The Shop and Boots No. 7.

Jane Douglas, 21 is the group's secret believes strongly in its aims and in t apies used, and is a forceful advocate other women in the group who are ticulate than she.

"One of my main aims is to promo sage and aromatherapy, because the do help us," she said.

"The group also helps me understa out women as people. I love having sions about things like that. I've nou the stage where I can say to my mu dad, look, I'm a young woman and I'm to do what I want to do."

Carol helped Susan Lee perk up her hair with some mousse and a blow-dry. The women are encouraged to think about how they would like their hair and to choose their own style.

"Thinking about how you look is a very neglected area in most centres," said Carol. "Being able to choose how you wear your hair and the colour and style of your clothes is very important."

"We set our sights too high at first. We've had to start with small things like getting Theressa to brush her own hair."

We introduced facials and how to apply makeup, which really seems to have helped their self-confidence.

Being in a wheelchair, we thought, should not deter anyone from having a really good professional haircut. So we got in touch with two of Oxford's top salons (Mahogany and St Clements Hair) and found the management more than helpful. All the members now make regular visits and are much more aware of how they want their hair to look.

Nail biting was quite a problem with many of the women. We started giving them a regular manicure and now 70 per cent of them have stopped biting their nails!

We realise that the women's group has developed mainly along traditional lines using traditional role models, but we felt that these things have to be experienced. Experience is all part of growing, and you can't accept or reject something you don't know about.

As the members grow in confidence they can make their own decision to accept or reject tra-

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in 1987

n. But a young women's like aromatherapy and give their views.

Doug Mckenzie, PPS

t themselves. Michele Woodford, 20 applied it. "I love the group," said uses beauty products from the Body

ditional role models. We want them to grow into balanced and happy young women who will be able to deal more easily with the difficulties that present themselves to severely disabled people entering adulthood.

One thing – more than anything else – stood out as the group developed: the need to be touched. Perhaps one of the reasons why severely disabled people often cling to child-like ways is their great need to be cuddled and loved. Able-bodied people can have regular relationships and cuddling your boy or girl friend takes the place of maternal or paternal loving. If you are severely disabled things are not that easy.

I decided to buy a book on simple massage and started in a limited way. But the group were so enthusiastic that I decided to find out more about alternative therapies.

I wrote to the Institute of Complimentary Medicine and since then I have been on several courses I thought would benefit the group.

Reflexology, for example, is a therapy that treats the feet.

"Zone therapy" is the basis of Foot Reflexology. It says that there are 10 equal zones running the length of the body from the top of the head to the tips of the toes – the 10 correspond to our 10 fingers and toes.

Congestion or tension in any part of a zone will affect the whole length of the body, cutting off energy like a dammed up river. The feet are "worked" to break down deposits which build up in them and to stimulate the reflexes of the feet. The reaction is best described as relaxation, or a return to equilibrium.

Medicines and surgery are, so the argument goes, frustrated because they are unable to treat the body as a whole. Reflexology aims to stimulate the whole body and to encourage the return of an equilibrium to all the body's complex systems.

Aromatherapy is the other therapy I have been using. Its aims are very similar to Reflexology except that they are reached by all-over massage using "essential oils". The massage and oil encourage the blood and lymph to flow more freely round the body.

People in wheelchairs have enormous problems with their circulation. They often have to sit for long periods in quite uncomfortable, even slovenly, positions.

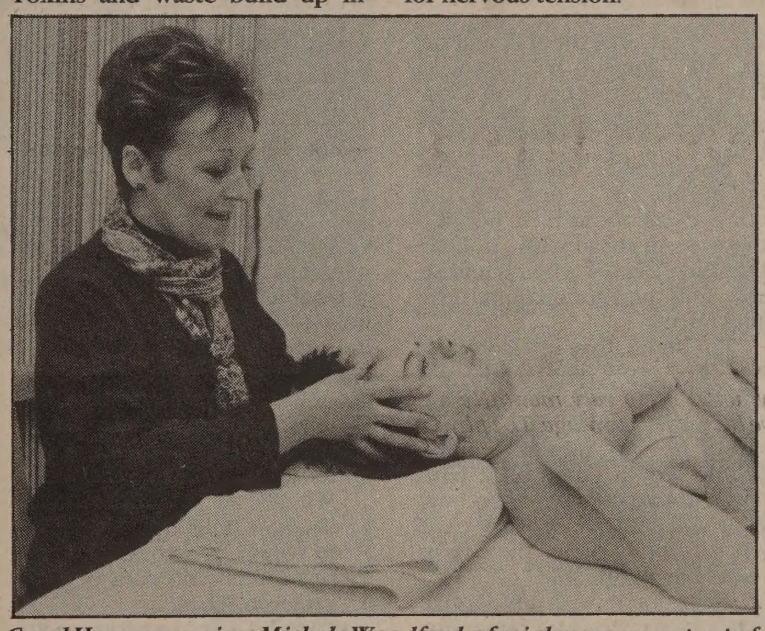
Tissues and organs are pushed into the wrong place; pressure is applied where it shouldn't be and the result is that the blood and lymph do not flow evenly. Toxins and waste build up in both systems and cannot be eliminated quickly enough so they escape into the tissues causing disturbances in the organs.

The oils used in the massage are very powerful – only 7 drops per 12ml of carrier oil are necessary. They are the essence of the plant. For example, it takes 100 kilos of rose petals to make ½ litre of essential oil.

The essential oils are absorbed by the skin and pass into the organs of the body. All sorts of conditions seem to be helped by them: lemon/juniper for poor circulation; eucalyptus/geranium/sage for kidney problems; bergamot/marjoram/neroli for nervous tension.

The women get together a few times a week for discussions. "It is very difficult in such a mixed ability group," said activities officer Alison Byard. "For those who don't understand what's going on though it's still a good thing to sit here with the others." Clockwise from centre: Theressa Walsh, Michele Woodford, Tony Whitty, Jane Douglas, Samantha Watson, Alison Byard and Paula Henry.

The women have decorated their meeting room with posters, mobiles and flower arrangements.



Carol Houseman gives Michele Woodford a facial massage as part of an aromatherapy session. "I love massage," said Michele. "It makes me feel lovely and relaxed."

Theressa Walsh, 24, loves having her nails manicured. "It makes me feel nice and pretty," she said. Most of the women have given up biting their nails since they started having manicures.

s aromatherapy to stimulate the women's circulation and improve their ealth. The essential oils are massaged into the skin and absorbed. omen's group is not just about looking good, it's about feeling good too althy body feels good," says Carol. She has been on several courses to ut the therapies she practises at Jack Howarth House.

Aromatherapy and reflexology have both been a resounding success at Jack Howarth House – for men as well as women. They help to meet the need for touch and physical closeness and they seem to improve health as well.

I am firmly convinced that these therapies are of great value to severely disabled people and I sincerely hope that more centres will start using them.

Carol Houseman is activities co-ordinator at Jack Howarth House, which is run by the Stars Organisation for Spastics.

***Aromatherapy** For a good practitioner in your area contact the International Federation of Aromatherapists, 7 Wardo Avenue, London SW6. Costs from £15 to £25 for an hour.*
***Reflexology** For a reputable practitioner write to the Institute of Complementary Medicine, 21 Portland Place, London W1, or ring 01-636 9543. Price range as for aromatherapy.*
***Massage** Body massage in beauty salons vary from about £9.50 for half an hour to £25 or more.*

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Holidays Holidays Holidays Holidays Holidays

Thomson Holidays

The Hotel Jerma Palace in Malta gets a Thomson 5-T rating for Moorish style and luxury.

"We see disabled people as a market. They need holidays like everyone else"

Mary Wilkinson talks to Ron Wheal of Thomson Holidays

Two people with disabilities who use wheelchairs are off for a Horizon holiday in Tenerife this month. "I was amazed at how easy it was," said one of them. "We went to our local travel agent and told them our needs. They said no problem, and there doesn't seem to be any."

Their decision underlines a trend observed by Thomson, the biggest tour operator, who doubled its business last year. "Our Client Services Department had 6,700 enquiries about special holiday requirements in 1986 compared to 4,500 the year before," says Ron Wheal, head of client relations. "That represents 65 per cent of all our enquiries."

It was the International Year of Disabled People (1981), he thinks, which stirred the general tour operators to take disabled people seriously and to see them, their families and friends as part of the holiday market. In his view the pendulum then swung too much towards promoting sales, with operators not thinking carefully enough about the special problems posed by disability.

Thomson, he hopes, has got the balance right. "We see disabled people as a market. We see disabled people as human beings and we see them as needing holidays like everyone else. We are trying to ensure that we provide the best possible service over the entire spectrum."

Perhaps because he has a disability himself, Ron Wheal sees the pitfalls of group packaging in a glossy brochure. "Disabilities are very different", he says, "and a hotel that will suit one person won't suit another."

So the service at Thomson treats each disabled holidaymaker as an individual. "We ask anyone who is disabled and requires special facilities to contact our Client Services Department or their travel agent and give us the facts relating to their disability. We will then try to match a holiday to their needs from our programme," says Ron Wheal.

Strict honesty on the part of the disabled person is essential, he says, even to saying which leg is disabled, because this can influence seat allocation and ultimately comfort.

The Client Services Department which he set up in 1979 now has a staff of 9, 5 of them trained to deal with disability needs. They can advise on a hotel or area, or refer a caller to the Holiday Care Service which holds a list of resorts vetted by Thomson and the Service.

Ron Wheal feels so strongly about getting a holiday right that if Thomson has no suitable hotel in a chosen area the staff will say so and Thomson will even refund a deposit rather than allow someone to go to an unsuitable place.

Nevertheless, about a dozen holidaymakers a year do not come clean about their disabilities or push ahead with a holiday they have been warned is unsuitable, and then complain bitterly afterwards.

"I'm afraid that in that situation my reply is 'Tough. We warned you and you heeded not'", says Ron Wheal. "But it would be very nice if disabled people would come back with constructive comments on how we might improve our service or tell us about areas they have found ideally suitable."

The problem with any service of this kind is that a tour operator cannot control what goes on in other countries. "A smooth operation depends very much on the local service at an airport and we can't influence that too much. All we can do is to ensure that the information is fed to them and they have an awareness of the needs."

"Another thing one must bear in mind is that not all the countries we visit have the same sympathetic attitude towards disability as we do," says Ron Wheal. "Some European countries are not terribly sympathetic and others regard human life in such a way that disabled people come very low on the list. If you as a disabled person choose to go there, you must accept the vagaries of that country."

Having said that, though, he agrees that genuine complaints about services which Thomson can control are taken seriously, and if something went badly wrong a discretionary allowance would be paid.

Disabled people who go on holiday with Thomson travel in the same way as everyone else, paying the prices in the brochures. The client services are free. But there is no reduction for the helpers who are required by Thomson to travel too.

"We take the view that simply to discount holidays for the disabled would be wrong, because there would be no control over it," says Ron Wheal.

Instead, Thomson provides 80 per cent of the funding for the Handicapped Aid Trust, a charity set up in 1982 by Ron Wheal along with Bill Hargreaves (of The Spastics Society), which meets the costs of a helper. So far about 7,000 disabled people have been able to take a holiday.

Thomson also works closely with other disability organisations, for example, the Winged Fellowship Trust.

Looking ahead, it seems unlikely that tour operators outside major companies like Thomson or Horizon will move into providing serices for disabled people. "This kind of service is not without its problems," says Ron Wheal. "The disabled person on holiday does require special treatment and special care, and someone has to pay for that. With specialist operators it tends to be the holidaymaker."

The way to improve the service for disabled people is, he thinks, to improve information exchange, cooperation and coordination between tour operators, airlines, airport administrators and so on.

At the Aerobility '86 Conference last October, he chaired a working party which considered the promotion of services available worldwide.

"The feeling I had was here we were building the M25 motorway. There were large chunks of it that were beautifully laid out, sections of it that had been tarmaced several times, and gaping big holes where nothing had been done. It is all very well to have a nice, comfortable arrangement on the aeroplane and at the hotels, but it is not good if the time getting to the plane, getting off the plane and getting to the hotel is so fraught as to make life difficult.

"What we've got to do is to make sure that *all* the people providing the services understand and work together".

The situation is not helped, he thinks, by disabled people, such as some American representatives at the Conference, who adopt an "up-with-this-I-will-not-put attitude" about imperfect services.

"At one point I said it made me wonder why I was spending so much of my time and the company's money in promoting holidays for the disabled," says Ron Wheal. "We cannot expect that everything will always be there for us. Life is not perfect."

Thomson's Client Services Department, tel: 01-387 9697, ext 4242.

Palm-fringed pool at Hotel El Fuerte, Costa del Sol.

English Tourist Board

Thames Tower, Black's Road
London W6 9EL
Telephone: 01-846 9000

The English Tourist Board is a statutory body created by the Development of Tourist Act 1969, to develop and market England's tourism. Its main objectives are to encourage British people to visit England; to encourage people living in England to take their holidays there, and to encourage the provision and improvement of tourist amenities and facilities in England.

There are 500 Tourist Information Centres in England which can provide friendly help and advice on where to stay, what to see, where to go and how to get there. There are always plenty of brochures and pamphlets available for you to take away and often maps and guides to buy.

The Holiday Care Service is a registered charity. It aims to help those who are elderly, disabled, or with special family circumstances who are looking for budget holidays or holidays suitable for single parents or unaccompanied children. Individuals, their families or friends, or those who care for them, can telephone or write to the Holiday Care Service, explaining their problem and the kind of holiday they are looking for. The Holiday Care Service will give details of what seems most appropriate to their needs (accommodation, travel, other facilities), and the enquirer can then make his own reservations. The Service is free.

The Holiday Care Service is at: 2 Old Bank Chambers, Station Road, Horley, Surrey RH6 9HW. Telephone: (0293) 774535.

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Holidays Holidays Holidays Holidays Holidays

My best holiday: Finland with a family

In July we flew from Luton to Helsinki on a Finnair DC9. I had never been on an aircraft in my life before. I was a bit apprehensive at first, but no more; it's a wonderful feeling. I was well looked after too. No disabled person need worry about being lifted in and out of the plane as the aircraft crew saw to it all.

I went with Ulla Granger-Allen, a super SRN who works at the Cheshire Home where I live, and with her two teenage children. We visited her relations and stayed either in a private home – so many people live in convenient bungalows in Finland – or spent just the nights in a motel chosen by Ulla.

I have been to Switzerland and Lourdes before, but this is the holiday I enjoyed most because I was living as a guest with a happy family atmosphere around me and plenty of rest and being lazy thrown in. (Ulla and I never woke each other up while we were on holiday!)

We hired a car. I had to teach myself another way of getting in and out of it because in Finland the driver's seat is on the left, but I soon mastered it.

In the first motel near Tampere there were 3 steps to the door. One night I remember we made our way back at nearly 1 am and a group of men lifted my wheelchair up the steps. We both said our prayers as the men were drunk!

Inside, the motel was quite accessible. I found I could do a lot more for myself from a lower bed where I was not afraid of falling out. Getting washed and dressed from an ordinary chair was quite easily done, and what I could not manage Ulla helped me with.

In Tampere we went to the children's zoo plus the Dolphinarium and we saw some very nice views from the post office tower.

In the Dolphinarium, the only one in Finland, there was a place for disabled people in wheelchairs. I sat next to a spastic person who was in a Newton wheelchair – I had helped to make them when they were first produced about 20 years ago.

Most of the time the weather was lovely and hot and we sat in the garden and had supper outside.

I enjoyed going shopping very much. It made such a lovely change from looking things up or asking people to get them for you. In Rauma, where we spent our second week, there was a big department store called the Centurian. I bought coloured glassware there which is one of Finland's specialities.

I liked the drive to Rauma. We touched nearly 120km an hour. It was a clear, wide road compared to English roads and we did not get caught in any traffic jams. All you could see for miles were trees and lakes.

My advice to anyone who gets an offer like this is to take it. Do get out and about and enjoy yourself. Also, keep slim – or try to – it helps getting in and out of a car!

Barbara Hunt

Most flights to Helsinki are from Heathrow. A return ticket this summer will cost from £230. Contact the Finnish Tourist Board, 66 Haymarket, London SW1Y 4RF, tel: *01-839 4048 for more information.*

Ulla Granger-Allen

Lakeside peace: Barbara with Jo and Edward Granger-Allen.

Netherlands National Tourist Office

Typical Dutch drawbridge – at Zierikzee, in the south of Holland.

Eating rollmops and watching boats

Last summer we spent 2 weeks in a holiday chalet at Nievwliet, near the fishing port of Bresken. There were 3 of us from Wakes Hall (where I go 3 times a week) and Paul and Maria Connolly who are members of staff.

We crossed over on the Germany ferry (Olan Ferries) between Sheerness and Vlisingen and took a minibus with us so that we could explore this southern part of Holland and go further afield too. We bought our own food in the local supermarket.

I am mobile, which you need to be for the chalet, but I use a wheelchair too. Holland is flat so it makes the going in a wheelchair easy.

We went to see the Heringvliet Dam. We also visited the museum there which explains about the great floods of 1983 after which the dam was built.

At Terneuzen we watched the boats going in and out of the locks with the bridges going up and down, and another time, on our way to Hulst, we went over the border to watch barges and cargo ships going to Sas-Van-Gent. On our way home we stopped at Bresken to buy some fresh fish for tea – lovely!

On Sunday we all chose a trip to Belgium. We travelled down the coast and then into France, going via Menen to see some of the First World War graves.

The next day we were off again in the other direction to Middelburg where there was a miniature village in the middle of the town. There was good shopping there, easy for wheelchairs, and some nice churches and old buildings.

The weather was lovely most of the time and I got a good tan. I really got a taste for rollmops too – I had never had them before.

Lynn Manhood

Lynn relaxing with a friend.

The chalet was rented from Ftichting Recreatie Gehamdicattan, Breda e.o., Spoorbaan 80, 5051 EQ Goirle, Holland. A leaflet listing holiday facilities accessible to wheelchairs is available from the Netherlands National Tourist Office, 25-28 Buckingham Gate, London SW1E 8LD tel: *01-630 0451.*

"You've got to be fit!"

David Maddy, from Clacton-on-Sea, spent 10 days near Biarritz last summer, close to the French-Spanish border.

"I enjoyed myself very much", he said. "I went with the Winged Fellowship."

David has cp and is in a wheelchair. He wanted a holiday where there were helpers but he also wanted plenty of action; the Winged Fellowship was good at supplying both.

The party of 9 holidaymakers and 9 helpers (one of them a nurse) flew from Heathrow to Bordeaux on an Air France plane and were met by the Trust's bus. Its driver had checked accommodation and places of interest beforehand.

They were driven to a hotel at Anglet, the base for many trips. They visited Biarritz, Bayonne and crossed the border to see San Sebastian. On one occasion they went up the foothills of the Pyrenees in a train with open carriages and bought duty-free goods at the border.

David remembers especially 2 outings. One was to a factory where Izarra, a Pyrenean liqueur made from brandy and herbs is produced and bottled. The other was to some caves where he was lifted down a lot of steps – "Jolly hard work" – and saw stalagmites and stalactites.

One day they went to St Jean de Luz, a picturesque fishing village, where they watched a pelotte match, a Basque game played with a ball and wicker raquet. Then they had a barbecue by the sea and saw the carnival with a band and fireworks.

Another day they went on a boat trip up the River Adour. "We had a picnic and some people went water-skiing and some had a ride in a speed boat."

When they were not out sightseeing, they went swimming (or sat in a dinghy) and visited the shops.

On the last evening the party didn't end till 4 am.

"I would certainly recommend this kind of holiday", said David, "though you've got to be pretty fit."

The return flight, 10-days full board, insurance, etc. cost £560 each. For this year's holidays and the address of the Winged Fellowship Trust, see page 12.

French Government Tourist Office

Carnival time, St Jean de Luz

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VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS

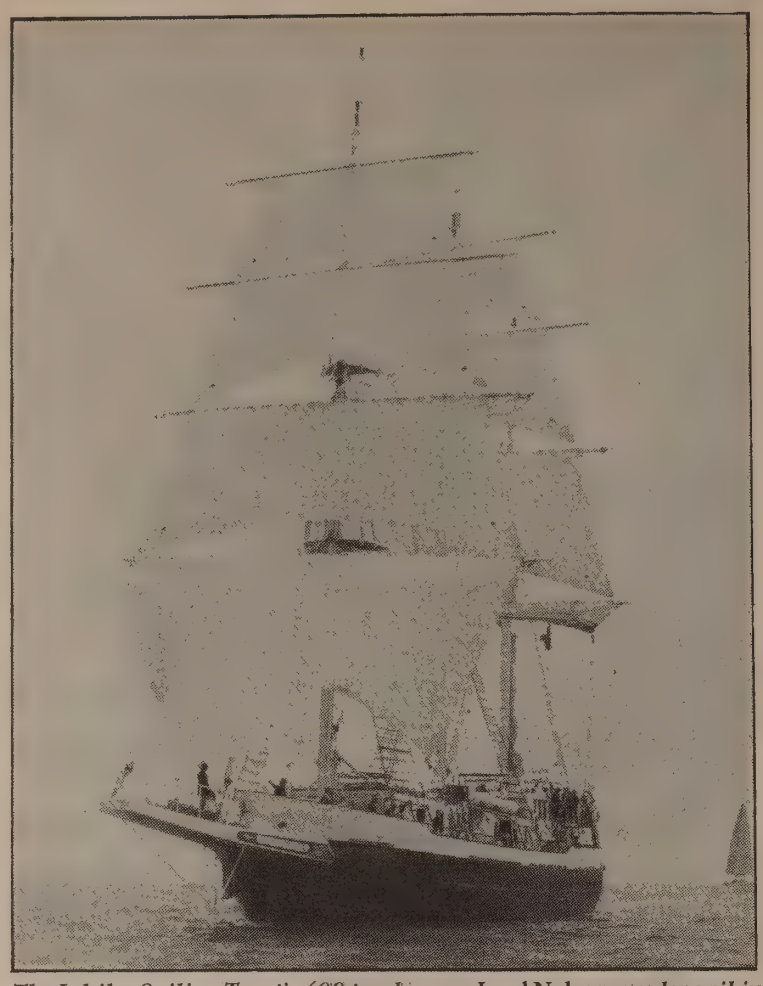
Jubilee Sailing Trust, Atlantic Road, Eastern Docks, Southampton SO1 1GD, *tel:* (0703) 631388. Sailing holidays for all would-be sailors from 16-70, disabled and ablebodied, aboard the 400 ton square-rigged barque "Lord Nelson".

Winged Fellowship, Angel House, Pentonville Road, London N1 9XD, *tel:* 01-833 2594. Provides holidays for disabled people whose disability may be severe. As well as their own 3 holiday centres in Surrey, Essex and Nottingham, which offer holidays and special interest fortnights, the Trust also arranges overseas holidays for small groups of disabled people with helpers provided. 1987 destinations will be Torremolinos (March and April), Morocco (May), Southern Ireland (June and July), Yugoslavia (September and October) and Rome (November and December).

PHAB (Physically Handicapped and Able-Bodied), Tavistock House North, Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9HJ, *tel:* 01-388 1963. Organises holidays in Britain and overseas.

Churchtown Farm Field Studies Centre, Lanlivery, Bodmin, Cornwall, *tel:* (0208) 872148. This centre, run by The Spastics Society, provides field study and adventure courses for children and adults with disabilities.

Park House in Sandringham Park, birthplace and childhood home of Princess Diana, is to open as a country house hotel in April. It is being run by the Leonard Cheshire Foundation. Fifteen of the 16 bedrooms have their own bath and shower and the interior of the house has been architect-adapted for the needs of disabled people, including blind people. Twenty-four hour care is provided by qualified staff, but guests can choose to come alone or with friends or carers. Open all the year round, bed and breakfast, half-board or full-board. A single room, full board, in a peak period will cost £275 a week. Brochure (with tariff) available from Park House, Sandringham, King's Lynn, Norfolk. *tel:* (0485) 43000.



The Jubilee Sailing Trust's 400 ton barque Lord Nelson, *under sail in the Solent.*

Princess Mary House is a purpose-built holiday centre for disabled people in Harrogate. Run by the British Red Cross Society, it can cater for 31 guests and is a good centre from which to explore the Dales, York and Knaresborough. Princess Mary House, Queen Parade, Harrogate, N Yorkshire HG1 5PP, *tel:* (0423) 61402.

RNIB holiday hotels. The Royal National Institute for the Blind runs 4 hotels in Scarborough, Llandudno, Blackpool and Eastbourne. The hotels are like others except that staff and other guests understand the problems of visual handicap. For a leaflet about these hotels and details of their special care holidays contact RNIB, 224 Great Portland Street, London W1N 6AA, *tel:* 01-388 1266.

Project Phoenix Trust organises and runs study tours and interest holidays abroad for mixed physical ability groups of adults who may need a high level of personal care but are interested in art, architecture and the environment. Helpers are provided free of charge. Write to Mrs V. Saunders, 68 Rochfords, Coffee Hall, Milton Keynes.

Ellerslie Court Holiday Home, run by the Southport and District Spastics Society, is now offering maxi- and mini-break holidays on full board. From 10 January, there will be maxi-breaks, from Monday to Friday, costing £60 per person, and mini-breaks, from Friday evening to Monday afternoon, costing £40 per person. The Ellerslie Court Holiday Home, 38 Westcliffe Road, Southport, Merseyside PR8 2BT, *tel:* (0704) 68545/65118.

Young Disabled on Holiday (part of Holidays for the Disabled) caters for physically disabled people aged 18-30. Three or 4 holidays are organised each year by the committee which is composed of disabled and able-bodied people. Voluntary helpers are supplied. Contact Miss R Girdlestone, 6 Yewlands Drive, Boothsmere, Knutsford, Cheshire WA16 8AP, *tel:* (0565) 4973.

FERRIES

All ferry companies operating from British ports will help disabled people given prior notification of their needs. Facilities on board ship vary so it is important to make your needs known.

For example, all Townsend Thoresen ships are accessible for wheelchairs and entrances to cabins and lavatory cubicles are at least 22.5 in. wide. On their new Blue Riband ships operating between Dover and Calais there are disabled toilets.

SPECIALIST COMPANIES

Threshold Travel, Wrendal House, 2 Whitworth Street West, Manchester M1 5WX, *tel:* 061-236 9763. Destinations in the 1987 brochure include a Kenya safari, coach tours of Italy and the Highlands of Scotland. People who need assistance must be accompanied by an able-bodied companion.

Chalfont Line, 4 Medway Parade, Western Avenue, Perivale, Middx UB6 8HA, *tel:* 01-997 3799. Offers group holidays for disabled people, friends and families in the UK and abroad. A new Liberation service offers coach excursions and day trips, eg sight-seeing tours of London and day trips to France. Send for the brochure.

Carefree Holidays (incorporating Out and About), 64 Florence Road, Northampton, *tel:* (0604) 34301. Holidays at home and abroad. If you need an escort on UK and air holidays there is a 20 per cent supplement to cover the costs of taking the extra helpers. On continental coach tours people should provide their own helper. Holidays start from Leicester, but can pick up people from further afield. Brochure available.

HOLIDAY INFORMATION

The Holiday Care Service, 2 Old Bank Chambers, Station Road, Horley, Surrey RH6 9HW, *tel:* (0293) 774535 is the main source of free information and advice on holidays in the UK and overseas for people with disabilities. It has vetted many hotels and holiday resorts abroad. For information about the new, free holiday helpers scheme, which introduces a disabled person to a holiday helper, *tel:* (0293) 775137.

Holidays for Disabled People 1987, £2, published by RADAR, 25 Mortimer Street, London W1N 8AB. A comprehensive guide to holidaying in Britain. The first section gives useful general information and organisations while the second has accommodation arranged by region.

Holidays & Travel Abroad – A Guide for Disabled People 1987, £1.50 (including postage) from RADAR (available late January). General advice on planning a holiday abroad; details of voluntary and commercial organisations who operate holidays abroad, and a list of package tour operators who are able to cater for disabled holidaymakers to some extent. The guide also gives information on 40 countries with useful contact addresses, transport details, local guides, accommodation and tour companies.

Directory for Disabled People. Compiled by Ann Darnbrough & Derek Kinrade, £11.50, Woodhead-Faulkner. This comprehensive handbook has two useful chapters on Holidays in Britain and Holidays Abroad with details of organisations and guides in some 25 countries.

Care in the Air – Advice for Handicapped Passengers is a free guide to air travel with advice on advance arrangements, fares, facilities at the airport and boarding and leaving the aircraft. Available from the Air Transport Users Committee, 129 Kingsway, London WC2B 6NN, *tel:* 01-242 3882.

Directory of Airline Facilities for Disabled People, published by Access to the Skies UK in conjunction with RADAR, explains the equipment and physical help available on 30 different airlines using UK airports. Free from RADAR.

Personal Toilet on Long Flights by Elizabeth Fanshawe, suggests ways of coping when you have no access to a lavatory for a long time. £1 from the Disabled Living Foundation, 380/384 Harrow Road, London W9 2HU.

HOLIDAY IDEAS

Skiing holidays for disabled people. There are still places available on trips to St Johann in Tirol (23 January to 1 February), Chiesa (8-15 March or 15-22 March), and Chatel (20-28 March). Contact the Uphill Ski Club, 12 Park Crescent, London W1N 4EQ, *tel:* 01-636 1989.

Lynhales, Lyonshall, Herefordshire HR5 3LN, *tel:* (05448) 238. Lynhales is a family-run Victorian country guest house specially adapted for disabled and elderly people. It stands in its own gardens and woodland and offers quiet, relaxing holidays, special interest weekends, minibreaks – and country cooking.

The Field Place Memorial Society have two self-catering holiday chalets (each furnished for 4 people) available for families with disabled children. They are at Milford-on-Sea, Hampshire in the Shorefield Holiday Village which also has facilities such as a heated swimming pool, shop, restaurant and launderette. £45-£130 a week. Contact Mr R Slade, 2 Rye Dale, Ashurst, Hants.

Elaine McCulloch, who has ms, recently went on a day trip to County Antrim. She travelled in a car with an able-bodied friend and they made the crossings between Stranraer and Larne with Sealink British Ferries. Apart from help getting her wheelchair into the lift and then up a couple of steps to the passenger section, she found the ferries "plain sailing." (There was a disabled toilet too.) "I hope my experiences will encourage other disabled people to get out and enjoy trips like this," she says.

TAKE OFF ON A WINGED FELLOWSHIP HOLIDAY

IF YOU ARE PHYSICALLY DISABLED BUT WANT A HOLIDAY.....

Why not join us for a week or two at one of our holiday centres in Essex, Surrey and Nottinghamshire, or take a trip abroad with us?

24 Hour nursing cover is provided, dedicated volunteers work alongside our experienced staff providing a family atmosphere.

Special rates are offered in low season and carers are welcome at certain times of the year.

Daily outings and activities are arranged. Special interest fortnights focus on drama, music and crafts.

Full details from:
WINGED FELLOWSHIP
Angel House
Pentonville Road
London N1 9XD
Tel: 01-833 2594

Winged Fellowship
Holidays for Disabled People

OUTLOOK

THEATRE

Ophelia from a wheelchair

The Actors' Touring Company's adventurous production of *Hamlet* was bound to stir up some controversy – not least because it cut the famous "To be or not to be..." soliloquy. But when Ophelia rolled herself onto a Cambridge stage in a wheelchair last month, it was no theatrical gimmick.

Actress Irene Macdougall had played the part on two legs for three months when a riding accident on her day off resulted in a crushed foot. A doctor told her not to use her leg again for a fortnight, but in best Hollywood tradition, Irene decided the show must go on. Her 2 weeks in a wheelchair on and off stage gave her an occasionally alarming glimpse of the way people react to disability.

The production itself did not have to be changed much to accommodate a wheelchair. "It was more emotional changes I had to make," says Irene Macdougall. "I was very aware that Ophelia can seem a pathetic character. In this day and age people wonder why she puts up with the sort of treatment she gets. Having her in a wheelchair unfortunately tended to increase the problem. So I actually had to act her much stronger to counteract the pathetic image the audience had. The girl is a fighter and that's how I portray her."

Irene was surprised when people came up to her after a show and said how brave she was. "That wasn't true," she says. "It was actually all the other actors who were brave to act with me – I was more apt to steal the scene."

The real difficulties came outside the theatre. "I found there was a lot of kindness but a lot of people were also very patronising. What shocked me most were the appalling facilities most places have for disabled people. When we went to a cafe, I was appalled that my friend had to check that disabled people could get in. I found myself getting very cheeky. If people treated me as less than human, I'd behave like that."

Such experiences helped her to portray a wheelchair-bound Ophelia, especially in the scenes were she has apparently gone mad. Irene believes that Ophelia is aware of King Claudius' plotting, and tries to make it clear in these scenes. Before her accident, however, she was conscious that Ophelia's jibes at the King and his co-conspirators were sometimes so obvious that it was hard to understand why they did not simply do away with her to shut her up.

"But with Ophelia in a wheelchair, that wasn't a problem," says Irene. "They obviously think she's such a poor old thing that it wouldn't be worth it. Ophelia's 'mad' speeches are like the wickedness I felt for people who patronised me – I felt I could be rude to people in the street because I knew they'd forgive me."

So successful was Irene's adaptation of her role that many people told her she should perform from a wheelchair even when she recovered. After 12 performances, however, she reverted to the conventional manner of playing Ophelia.

"It was fascinating to see another side to the role," she says. "I didn't mind doing it at all." What did rile her was the attitude of a reporter who seemed to think Ophelia *had* to be on 2 legs because Shakespeare did not specify that she must be in a wheelchair, and who suggested that the audience might feel conned.

"I was angry," she says. "I took great insult for the people who are always in a wheelchair and for myself as an actress. I do honestly believe that after the first scene people didn't really notice."

Simon Crompton

Cambridge Evening News

Irene Macdougall as Ophelia in Hamlet.

TELEVISION

Antenna on brain damage: imbalance like this can be dangerous

Antenna (BBC2, 1 December caused me a lot of personal anxiety. A paediatrician was advocating ceasing artificial life-support for babies whose brain damage was bad enough to cause extreme and multiple handicaps.

The arguments both for and against this are complicated. I can understand the viewpoint of both the doctors and the parents but, as I cannot put myself in their shoes, it would be arrogant to pass judgement.

However, I think the producers allowed the doctor's argument to be paramount. It is true that balanced television is often bland television, but for a subject as sensitive as this we ought to hear "the other side" more clearly.

The programme featured three brain damaged children. One, a baby, had been allowed to die "naturally" after life-support systems had been turned off. The other two, both older, were seen through the eyes of their parents.

One set of parents said that their child was having such a difficult life that, given the choice again, they would perhaps opt to switch off the machinery. The other child's mother was glad that her son had been allowed to live, and said that he had brought great happiness to her and her family.

Unfortunately, her positive view was immediately qualified by the doctor who said that this example was exceptional and one didn't usually find such love and support in a family.

The overall impression was that brain damage almost inevitably means a quality of life which is not worth having.

This could have been avoided by including testaments by brain damaged people that our quality of life is well worth having. (I include myself because any distinction in terms of severity of brain damage was blurred in the programme, and all brain damaged people appeared grouped together.)

There are many people of all ages with physical and mental handicaps who could explain that brain damage is not necessarily tragic. I hope the paediatrician is aware of this. By leaving it out of the programme the public were not reminded of it. Imbalance like this can be dangerous.

Chat shows rarely feature disability. But **Wogan** (BBC1, 28 November) managed it. Terry interviewed Donna McGrath, teenage winner of Barnardo's Champion Children Award for Triumph over Adversity.

It was a situation which could easily go wrong. Donna is in a wheelchair. She is blind and scarcely moves, appearing almost doll-like. A perfect victim for pathos and a patronising style. Terry avoided them, and Donna discouraged them. Credit to them both. If 1987 has more programmes like this, it will be a good year.

Chris Davies

BOOKS

No Laughing Matter

by Joseph Heller and Speed Vogel
(Jonathan Cape, 32 Bedford Sq, London WC1B 3EL. £10.95)

Joseph Heller's standing as one of the most challenging and imaginative post-war writers is not likely to be greatly bolstered by this account of the author's disabling illness and recuperation. But *No Laughing Matter* is honest, funny and readable all the same.

In December 1981, Joseph Heller seemed to be at the peak of health. None of his friends could believe that the tanned 58-year-old who jogged 4 miles daily became within days almost totally paralysed with the rare and sometimes fatal Guillain Barre Syndrome.

The story of his 6-month hospitalisation is told alternately by the mystified patient himself and his trusted sidekick, Speed Vogel, who forged Heller's signature on £100,000-worth of cheques to pay for his treatment. It is packed with anecdotes about the cliquey band of friends and celebrities (including Dustin Hoffman and Mel Brooks) who gather round his hospital bed and make it one of the liveliest spots in Manhattan and about Joseph's gourmet club – "a herd of gluttonous pigs who ate Chinese food ravenously and disgustingly once a week".

It is also lavishly laced with the precise medical details of every stage of Heller's illness, which makes this the ideal book for those who like talking about, and listening to others talking about, their operations.

Expecting some of the morbid and hilarious comedy Heller had dazzled with in *Catch 22*, I was disappointed that this book didn't make me laugh more. We hear a lot about everyone falling around in hysterics in the patient's hospital room, but rarely share the joke. Maybe that's the point, and Heller finds laughing at his own disability and brush with death just a little too black.

Simon Crompton

Coping with disability

by Millicent M Isherwood
(Chambers. £2.95)

Millicent Isherwood was severely disabled by polio at the age of 22. From her own experience, she writes about the practical problems of disability with a style which is down to earth.

The book would be particularly useful for anyone starting a new phase of life. For instance, it could help a family whose son or daughter might be coming home from boarding school, or for a person with a disability – of whatever age – interested in setting up a home of their own.

I particularly liked the author's concern for the feelings and the welfare of carers. She has sound advice such as, "You will feel the need to share the frustration and the suffering, but as a carer you will have suffering and frustration of your own, of a different kind, from which you cannot escape. Save your endurance for that."

I also liked her acknowledgment that independence often involves taking help from other people and that it can be accepted cheerfully without loss of dignity.

The book is packed full of sound advice and sensible suggestions, clearly arranged under bold headings. For instance, she has a chapter on "house and home, safe and sound?" and one on "getting out and about and rescued".

Her chapter on "relationships, strategies and sex" is as well balanced as the rest of the book. In fact there is a lot of wisdom to be found there. At the same time it is lightened by pithily told anecdotes, some of which made me laugh out loud.

Valerie Lang

LYNHALES

Lynhales is a family run Victorian country guest house which has been converted specifically with the needs of disabled guests in mind, offering a wide variety of holidays for disabled people, their families and friends.

Set in 6 acres of private gardens and woodland, over half a mile from the road, we offer peace and quiet in beautiful countryside close to the Brecon Beacons, Wye Valley, Black Mountains and much more.

Country cooking using fresh local produce, an adapted minibus to meet you from the station and for daily outings, a bar and a friendly, informal atmosphere are all part of what we offer.

Enjoy a summer holiday away from the crowds, try a special interest weekend or a bargain spring and autumn minibreak. Special group booking rates available.

Please ring or write for a full brochure and more details or to discuss your individual holiday requirements. Ask for Jon or Jenny.

LYNHALES, LYONSHALL, HEREFORDSHIRE
HR5 3LN
LYONSHALL (05448) 238

Share Your Problems

With Margaret Morgan

Ten ways to make 1987 the best year yet!

Now is the time for New Year Resolutions!

1987 finds me resolved to be less of a hoarder of miscellaneous items, which I keep just in case they might come in handy. During 1987 I plan to go to jumble sales, *not* to buy, but to dispose of the unwanted junk that I find it so difficult to part with.

Most of us will have ideas about what we might give up or change in the year ahead of us. But what about some positive plans for what we are *going to do* during 1987? There are so many possibilities available for those of us who are prepared to get out and about and "have a go".

Of course, there are problems and transport is probably one of the most difficult to solve. But it is surprising how, with initiative and enterprise, many of the obstacles can be overcome.

If money is short, don't be shy about asking about grants and funds which might help. Here is a list of 10 possibilities for 1987. Perhaps one of them will appeal to you?

Ten tips:

1 Plan a good holiday. There are many exciting opportunities, so shop around; visit your local travel agency and find out what's going this year. Skimming through the travel brochures is a tonic in itself.

2 Find out about clubs, meetings, talks and activities in your area. Try to join a new group. How about a Scrabble group? Or have you ever thought of Yoga, meditation or relaxation classes?

If you want to be more active have a go at Judo or self-defence.

It might be difficult for you to join a general class, but it is well worth discussing your special needs with the leader.

In many areas there are classes and groups for people with disabilities. Go along to your local library and look at the notice boards. Ask the librarian, if you can't find what you want. Local newspapers are also a very good source of information.

3 A new challenge may appear in 1987: a training course or different work. Try to be an optimist and enthusiastic.

If you feel you are in a rut and want to get out of it, arrange to talk things over with an appropriate professional person.

Share your problems by phone

If you want advice on a personal or spiritual problem, why not talk to Lin Berwick, *Disability Now's* telephone counsellor, who is disabled herself?

Lin is at the end of the line on Monday afternoons from 1pm to 5pm, and on Thursdays from 6pm to 10pm.

Her telephone number is Hornchurch (04024) 58325.

4 Getting out and about may not be quite such a problem as some of us imagine. The FX4 conversion of the black cab is now available in 22 centres outside London (*see page 4*) and the number of Dial-a-Rides is increasing all the time. Do check your Yellow Pages. Also, the Chalfont Line's new Liberation leaflet gives ideas for off-season daytrips and coastal runs *(address on page 12)*.

Simon Crompton

5 What about going to a conference? This year PHAB and SPOD are running three separate but sequential events under the general theme People Need People.

For details of these and other conferences or courses see *DN's* What's On column every month.

6 If you have a favourite charity or good cause, find out how you can help.

The possibilities are boundless and range from sponsored events – such as knitting, slimming, parachute jumping – to collecting unwanted items – used stamps, old Christmas cards, bric-a-brac and clothes for charity shops.

Your local volunteer organiser will be able to give you details of special needs in your area.

7 Maybe you live with your parents and want to make your own way in life. Is this the year in which to consider the possibilities of moving into a home of your own or sharing accommodation with a friend?

It could mean considerable discussion and planning and you will probably need to learn more about home-making and budgetting your money.

Many voluntary organisations now offer short courses and other help with independent living schemes. Do make enquiries.

8 Take a good look at yourself. What about a new hair-style, some new clothes? Grow a beard or have a closer shave? Have you ever thought of going to a health and beauty centre? It really is a splendid experience even if a bit expensive.

I was having a meal at Champneys at Tring not long ago and I bumped into a disabled acquaintance who had been staying there for a few days with his girl friend.

Details of local centres and resorts are in the Yellow Pages.

9 TV and radio have very good educational programmes. What about learning a new language, trying an Open University course? Details can be obtained from the BBC and your local TV and radio stations. If you phone they will send you all the details.

10 Of course, you may already be very busy and longing for a break. Well, take one! Put your feet up and enjoy some relaxation or go out and paint the town red. Do what *you* want for a day.

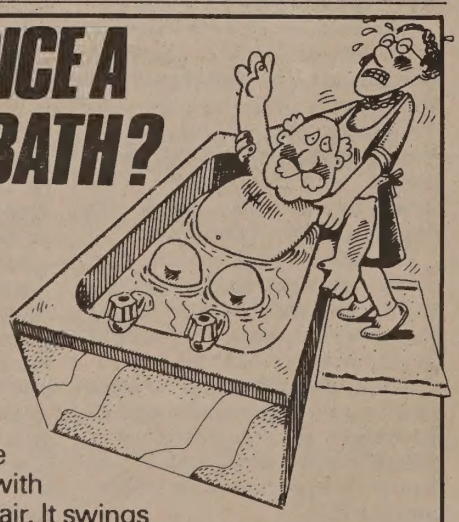
Many of us tend to think we are indispensable – and some really *are* – but it should be possible to find someone who can take over for a short time.

Get in touch with an organisation like Crossroads, if you are looking after someone with a disability, or your WRVS or British Red Cross should be able to advise.

Don't be put off if your first contacts aren't very positive. Go on trying.

I do hope that 1987 will prove to be an enjoyable and fulfilling year for all our readers.

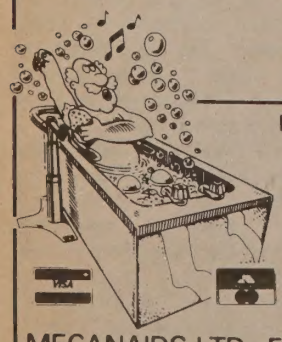
WHAT PRICE A RELAXING BATH?



Struggling to leave a bath is neither relaxing or safe—yet many elderly and less able people have little alternative.

Re-discover stress-free independent bathing with the Autolift bathing chair. It swings gently over the bath edge and right down into the water, and lifts out again, just by turning the handle.

Return the coupon today for your free colour booklet.



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What's On

Courses at Castle Priory

Personal Relationships and Sexuality – a 3 day course for staff working with people who have learning difficulties. Course tutors: Family Planning Association. 19-21 January. Tuition £52, residence £45, non-residence £15.

Developing the Positives! – a workshop on camera and simple darkroom techniques for introducing photography to people with disabilities. 21-23 January. Tuition £47, residence £42, non-residence £15.

Dance-Drama Dynamics – a course to develop awareness and creativity skills which can be used with people who have a sensory, intellectual or social handicap. Led by Wolfgang Stange. 30 January-1 February. Tuition £47, residence £42, non-residence £15.

Helping the Adult with Cerebral Palsy to Use the Hands – a one day course on basic principles. Led by Rosalind Verity. 12 February. Tuition £47, residence £42, non-residence £15.

A School Nurse Workshop in Health Education – to take school nurses through the practical stages of preparing and presenting material and developing their role in mainstream and special education. 16-18 February. Tuition £47, residence £42, non-residence £15.

Young People and their Families with Special Needs in the Asian Communities – a multi-disciplinary course for those working in health or education services who require a broader understanding of the cultural issues involved. 20-22 February. Tuition £47, residence £42, non-residence £15.

For more information about any of these courses, write to Castle Priory College, Thames Street, Wallingford, Oxon OX10 0HE. Tel: *(0491) 37551*

Conferences and Leisure

Godspell. Path Productions – Britain's first fully integrated company of able-bodied, physically disabled and mentally handicapped performers – are holding performances of this musical at the Jeannetta Cochrane Theatre, Southampton Row, London WC1 on 6-17 January. Tickets cost £3.50, £2 for students/unemployed/OAPs, or £1.50 each for parties of 6 or more (matinee only). Sign language interpretations of the play and braille programmes are available. For advance booking and further information *tel:* 01-359 7866.

Mental Health Film Council Seminars for 1987. The new programme of day seminars is now available. It includes Death and Loss on 29 January, Children with Down's Syndrome on 9 February, About Phobias on 24 February and Images of Physical Disability on 5 March. The seminars give people working in the area of mental health an opportunity to view films and videos useful for training and education. Seminars are held in London and the fee for each one is £19.55. For further information contact MHFC, 380-384 Harrow Road, London W9 2HU. *Tel:* 01-286 2346.

Maternity Emergency National Rally is taking place on Monday 6 April at the Central Hall, Westminster to protest against the scrapping of the maternity grant on that day. This means that for the first time in 70 years many women will have no financial help at all for a new baby. For further information and a copy of the Maternity Emergency leaflet contact Maternity Emergency c/o Maternity Alliance, 59-61 Camden High Street, London NW1 7JL. *Tel:* 01-388 6337

People Need People. PHAB (Physically Handicapped and Able Bodied) and SPOD (Association to Aid the Sexual and Personal Relationships of People with Disabilities) are holding 3 conferences, each looking at the issue of integration for young people with disabilities and their able-bodied peers. 30 June-3 July is Rights and Relationships: Young Disabled People Growing Up in Manchester; 3-5 July is PHAB In Action and 6-9 July is Together In Leisure in London. For further details write to the Conference Organiser, 286 Camden Rd, London N7.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Invalid Children's Aid Nationwide have changed their address to Allen Graham House, 198 City Road, London EC1V 2PH. *Tel:* 01-608 2462.

Heating Hotline, Help the Aged has set up a Heating Hotline to give people information and advice on keeping warm. Telephone Freefone 0800 289404. For a free leaflet, *Keep Warm this Winter,* write to Help the Aged (WW), Freepost, London EC1B 1BD.

Mobility is a free advice leaflet from Help the Aged. It includes advice on how to stay fit and active in later life, details of aids available for people who find they now need help with mobility, and useful addresses. Available from Help the Aged, 1 St James' Walk, London EC1R 0BE.

Back to the Community is a new 29-minute video, made for the DHSS. It explains the Government's care in the community initiative – helping long-stay patients leave hospital to live in non-institutional surroundings – and talks to people directly involved, including clients and team members. Available on free loan or for sale on VHS at £35 from CFL Visions, Chalfont Grove, Gerrards Cross, Bucks SL9 8TN. *Tel:* (02407) 4433.

In Touch Handbook. This provides useful information on such areas as employment, housing, leisure and education for visually handicapped people. Produced by BBC Radio 4's *In Touch* programme and available in print, braille, Moon and on tape. £4.95 from In Touch Handbook, PO Box 7, London W3 6XJ.

Neil Cross, Lancashire Evening Post

Cue the snookiebears. *The UK Professional Snooker Championship in November gave snooker star Tony Meo the chance to meet more cuddly versions of arch rivals Cliff Thorburn and Dennis Taylor than he's accustomed to confronting across the green baize. Teddy Cliff (left) and bespectacled Teddy Dennis were two of the 25 snookiebears dressed as top players and put on display at the championship by the Preston and District Spastics' Group. Raffling the bears raised over £4,000 which will go towards the group's latest project – a 16-bedded home with therapy pool for young people with cerebral palsy.*

PEOPLE

George Holmes has taken over from George Pollock as chairman of the Scottish Council for Spastics.

He has been a member of the Council's executive committee for 7 years and was appointed vice-chairman in 1985.

Mr Holmes retired from the post of director general of the Forestry Commission last year. He is Honorary Professor of the department of Forestry at the University of Aberdeen and a Commander of the Bath.

Forestry Commission

"The nature of my work with the Scottish Council for Spastics is so worthwhile that I find I get a lot of satisfaction from it," he said. "My greatest challenge is to improve the standard of the facilities and to continue the success we have had in raising funds."

He hopes the Scottish Council will work more closely with The Spastics Society in the future. "I think there is a lot more benefit to be gained by closer communication between the two societies," he said.

On the subject of conductive education he said the Scottish Council is looking into the matter very thoroughly with The Spastics Society and talking about the possibility of linking up to do some research in Scotland.

Peter Mahon, energetic director of the Mobility Trust, has managed to raise £50,000 in the 18 months the charity has been in existence.

The Trust, which helps people with all kinds of disabilities by providing equipment such as powered wheelchairs and campaigning on issues such as employment, has received no financial help from local authorities or the Government.

Speaking at a luncheon last month which raised a further £6,000 for the charity, founder and chairman Berkeley Hender said: "1986 has been a particularly effective year for the Trust, mainly due to the dedication and commitment of Peter Mahon. There is no doubt that Mobility Trust is providing an essential and long overdue service for disabled people."

Peter Mahon puts his fundraising success down to "cheek". His plans for the charity's future include setting up small offices all around the country employing a few people to ensure that disabled people who are "missed out" by other organisations receive some help.

He is an author and playwright, and draws no salary from the Trust. His television play *Shadow in a Landscape,* starring Susannah York, will be shown on Channel 4 this year.

One for the road

Pat Barham (*right*) poses on the finishing line of the New York marathon the day before she completed the 26 mile course and raised £600 for The Spastics Society.

Out of a record starting field of 21,000 she came in at number 14,776 in a time of 4 hours and 34 minutes.

Pat, who works on The Spastics Society's advertising at D'Arcy Masius Benton & Bowles, says that Central Park looked like a refugee camp.

"They actually do have psych teams of mental health experts who talk runners out of their depression if, say, they've failed to complete," she says. "There was one story about a guy who was scared of bridges and there are 3 huge ones you have to run over. He was taught by his analyst to overcome this problem."

Ronnie Burnett fulfilled a long-standing ambition to provide free community transport on his housing estate last month when he received a mini bus as national winner of the Whitbread Community Care Awards.

Ronnie Burnett, who is disabled with heart disease, has been putting community care into action.

He spends most of his time helping elderly and disabled people on his Bradford estate by picking up pensions, going on shopping trips and carrying out odd jobs free of charge.

When the Canterbury Estate Tenants Association was formed in 1981 Ronnie Burnett led a team of volunteers who spent a year clearing rubbish from the estate, transforming it from an eyesore to a community residents could take pride in.

Jack Hickes

CLASSIFIED

Holidays

VARCOE HOUSE HOLIDAY FLATS. Two well equipped self-catering flats, each to sleep up to 6 people, especially adapted for the disabled. Level access to flats and nearby sandy beach. Ample parking. Seasonal price range £45-£60 per week. Details from booking Manager, Mr L E Elliott, 3 Bosvean Gardens, Illogan, Nr Redruth. *Tel:* (0209) 218650

TWO SPECIALLY ADAPTED LUXURY BUNGALOWS, set in the heart of Clwyd, North Wales among magnificent pine trees, minutes from Mold town centre. Sleeps 4/6, each with additional separate bathrooms for wheelchair users. South facing private gardens, patio, barbeque, central heating, colour TV, stereo, large drive, telephone. Rates £135-£150 per week. Discounts available. Brochure from Mrs Lynn Dowling, 23 Gleneagles Road, Great Sutton, South Wirral L66 4NF. *Tel:* 051-339 5316 or 051-355 1005.

Services

SPECIAL CARE AGENCY finds nannies/mothers' helps for handicapped children (like mine), or care assistants for adults, everywhere. Ring Linda Layton (0491) 671842

Exchange

HOUSE EXCHANGE. Christian lady with cp son (wheelchair bound) wishes to exchange 1981 3-bed terrace house with extra ground floor room/bed/loo shower built on, in Stockport, Grt Manchester. For similar South coast or near. *Tel:* 061-431 3364

Find-A-Friend

GAY WOMEN with/without disabilities, all ages, friendship group. Newsletter, socials. SAE/tape/braille to Gemma, BM Box 5700, London WC1N 3XX

For Sale

DOWNS ROVA DELUXE SCOOTER. Nearly new, kerb and hill climber, dismantles into boot of car. £875 ono. Mrs Flood. *Tel:* 01-662 3454

VESSA VITESSE MK 2 ELECTRIC WHEELCHAIR (1983). Excellent condition. Kerb climbers, heavy duty batteries, tailored bag, sheepskin cushion, tray and charger. New tyres. £550. *Tel:* Lancaster (0524) 64297 anytime.

MEYRA POWER CHAIR. R or L hand control. Kerb climber, 2 new batteries, 4 years old, recently overhauled. Cost £2,850, asking £750. Mr Reeves, *Tel:* 01-570 9902. (after 6 pm.)

EVERAIDS TURBO electric indoor/outdoor elevating wheelchair. Seat, standing frame. As new. £1,500. Mr Glover. *Tel:* (0482) 650126

ZIMMER GB (Power by Dudley). £250. Contact Mrs L A Tucker, 2 Mead Street, High Wycombe, Bucks HP 13 7DR. *Tel:* (0494) 30792

ORTHO-KINETIC TRAVEL CHAIR, child's size (up to age 12). £300. *Tel:* 01-449 7649

BRAUN BATRICAR, approx 9 years old. Reasonable condition. Hood and cape. £400 ono. *Tel:* (0689) 58143

***CLASSIFIED RATES:** £1.50 per line, with a minimum charge of £6. Advertisers are invoiced after the advertisement appears. Find-a-Friend column is free. (All ads are free for members of The Spastics Society or an affiliated group.)*

SHAPE

is seeking a

DIRECTOR

to succeed Seona Reid who is leaving to take up the post of Assistant Director (Arts Policy and Development) at Greater London Arts.

Shape is a London-wide arts organisation which works for greater equality of opportunity in the arts for people with disabilities and "special needs".

Salary: £11,625 inc London Weighting
(rising to £12,694 in April)

Job Description and application forms from:
Shape, 1 Thorpe Close, London W10 5XL
Closing date for applications: January 23, 1987

Shape is an Equal Opportunity Employer and particularly welcomes applications from people with disabilities.

Details also available on tape.

SHAPE

RACE RELATIONS AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

DISABLED PERSONS UNIT

Training Officer

£10,569–£12,297

The county has developed a new training policy with emphasis on Equal Opportunities and Race Relations. We are seeking to develop our training initiatives and policy in respect of disablement issues and practice.

The post offers excellent opportunities for a trainer of proven achievement to join a team to offer progressive in service training to all staff in respect of disablement issues and the development of opportunities for disabled persons within the county.

Candidates would be required to have proven achievement and relevant experience in both the areas of training and disability.

Employment Officer

£10,569–£12,297

The county is committed to pursuing an Equal Opportunities in Employment Policy. From within the Disabled Persons Unit, it will be the Employment Officers' task to implement and monitor equal opportunities policy and practice in respect of disabled persons employment opportunities within the county.

The Employment Officer should be able to offer constructive dialogue with colleagues and the public in respect of employment opportunities for Disabled Persons within the County.

Candidates would be required to have proven achievement and relevant experience in both the areas of employment and disability.

Please reply to Equal Opportunities and Race Relations Dept., County Offices, Matlock, Derbyshire DE4 3AG. Tel: Matlock (0629) 3411 x 7399.

Closing date – 15th February 1987.

DERBYSHIRE
County Council
Supports Nuclear Free Zones

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Disability organisations on the warpath over benefits

Last month's admission by the Government that it had got its sums wrong and only 7,000 severely disabled people (not 10,000) will be eligible for the new severe disability premium of £23 a week has stung disability organisations into action.

They are particularly annoyed because if these figures had been available in the summer, the House of Lords' recommendation for a higher community care addition for disabled people might not have been overthrown by the Commons.

Representatives of the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People, RADAR, Disability Alliance, RNIB, the Disablement Income Group and The Spastics Society are to meet John Major, Minister for Social Security and the Disabled, on 21 January.

Meanwhile they are writing to him to protest both about the number of people eligible and the premium itself.

They believe that the new flat rate premium which comes into operation as part of the new Income Support Scheme in April will leave the majority of severely disabled people worse off than they are now. Many people can at present claim up to 14 additional allowances under Supplementary Benefit which can amount to more than the £23 per week.

Many severely disabled people will not even be able to claim the premium, especially if they do not receive attendance allowance and live alone.

The organisations will remind Mr Major that when plans for a new social security system were unveiled in 1985, Norman Fowler, the Social Services Secretary, said that benefits for disabled people would not be overhauled until a survey of the numbers and needs of disabled people by the Office of Population and Census Surveys had been completed. It is not due until 1987/8.

★ The crisis in services and staffing at local DHSS offices in London which led to a strike on 11 December has been underlined in a new report from the Greater London Citizen Advice Bureaux Service.

It has found that three-quarters of all offices failed "very frequently or frequently" in their statutory responsibility to assess and pay benefit within 14 days.

The report, which has all party support, calls for emergency action by the Government.

Out of Service *is available from GLCABS, 136/144 City Road, London EC1V 2QN, free to claimants and voluntary organisations, £1.50 to others.*

Morning Star

The thin red line. *A group of Labour MPs braved the rain and joined the picket line outside artificial limb makers J E Hanger in Roehampton last month. Health spokesman Frank Dobson (fourth left), Ian Mikardo, Alf Dubs, Tom Cox and John Fraser were showing solidarity with 300 sacked workers. Supply of limbs to disabled people has been disrupted by the dispute.*

Audit Commission Report
Continued from page 1

The Commission says that a high-level review should consider changing the organisational framework of community care. One possibility could be to make local authorities responsible for the long-term care of mentally and physically handicapped people in the community, except for severely disabled people who need medical supervision. The necessary resources could be transferred from the NHS, and authorities could buy in specialised care from the NHS or private sector.

"The one option that is not tenable is to do nothing about present financial, organisational and staffing arrangements," says the report. "If this opportunity is not taken, a new pattern of care will emerge, based on private residential homes rather than a more flexible mix of services . . ."

The Spastics Society, one of the four charities which make up the Community Care Campaigners, welcomes the report. "We welcome the exposure of the mish-mash of funding arrangements which too often dictates where disabled people should live," says John Cox, director of The Spastics Society.

Making a Reality of Community Care *by the Audit Commission for Local Authorities in England and Wales costs £9.60 from HMSO Publications Centre, PO Box 276, London SW8 5DT.* Tel: *01-622 3316.*

Integrated Lit Contest

BBC *Woman's Hour* has joined forces with The Spastics Society for the 1987 Literary Contest, launched this month by Susan Tully, Michelle of *Eastenders.* For the first time any able-bodied person with experience of disability may enter.

Woman's Hour will be presenting a special award and the winning entry will be broadcast on BBC *Morning Story.*

There are four sections in the contest – adult fiction and non-fiction, and junior fiction and non-fiction (up to age of 16). There will be no poetry section this year.

First prizes are £150 for the winner in the adult section, sponsored by *Writers' Monthly,* and £50 for the best junior entry, sponsored by Walker Books.

People with a disability can write on any topic but those who are not disabled are asked to write about their experience of disability. All entries will be judged on literary merit.

The closing date is Friday 3 April.

Entry forms are available from The Spastics Society Literary Contest, Richard House, 30 Mortimer St, London W1N. Please enclose SAE.

Labour backs integration

Shadow education spokesman, Giles Radice, has criticised the Government for its lack of commitment to special education. He stressed the Labour Party's support for integration and more flexible access to higher education for disabled people.

Speaking at the annual conference of the National Bureau for Handicapped Students at the end of November, Mr Radice said the Government had failed to provide the resources and political drive needed to implement the 1981 Education Act, the legal basis for integrating disabled children into ordinary schools.

The statements of special needs prepared on every disabled child by the local education authority, which is the key to implementing the 1981 Act, are not being prepared quickly enough, said Mr Radice.

"What is even more disturbing is that some LEAs are not producing the statements based on the child's needs, but are tailor-making the statements in line with what provision the LEA has available."

"Special schools in some areas are being closed to save money rather than promote integration," said Mr Radice. He then outlined Labour's approach to education for disabled children and adults.

- Labour is committed to increasing nursery education, with priority being given to disabled 3 and 4 year olds.
- More effective legislation is needed for the further education of disabled people. The age limit for free education for disabled people should be raised.
- Higher education should be more flexible. Credit transfers would be very helpful, allowing disabled students to move from one course or university to another, enabling them to study for parts of degrees or over a period of time.
- Universities, polytechnics and further education colleges should actively recruit mature students who missed out at school.
- Initial teacher training should include a special education element.

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